

NVVMEN

*International
Review for the History
of Religions*

VOL. L NO. 1 2003

N⁵o

ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE

www.brill.nl

BRILL

NVMEN

PUBLISHER: Brill Academic Publishers
PUBLISHED: Four times a year: January, April, July and October.
SUBSCRIPTION: The subscription price of volume 50 (2003) is EUR 169.- / US\$ 196.- for institutions and EUR 88.- / US\$ 102.- for individuals, *inclusive of postage and handling charges*. All prices are exclusive of VAT in EU-countries (VAT not applicable outside the EU). Price includes online subscription.

Subscription orders are accepted for complete volumes only. Orders take effect with the first issue of any year. Orders may also be entered on an automatic continuing basis. Cancellations will only be accepted if they are received before October 1st of the year preceding the year in which the cancellation is to take effect. Claims for missing issues will be met, free of charge, if made within three months of dispatch for European customers and five months for customers outside Europe.

Once the issue is published the actual dates of dispatch can be found on our website: WWW.BRILL.NL.

Subscription orders may be made via any bookseller or subscription agency, or direct to the publisher.

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	P.O. Box 9000	112 Water Street, Suite 400
	2300 PA Leiden	Boston, MA 02109
	Tel: +31 71 535 35 66	Tel: (617) 263 2323
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BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON

ISSN 0029-5973 (print version); 1568-5276 (online version)
Printed in The Netherlands Printed on acid-free paper

NVMEN

Numen is edited on behalf of the International Association for the
History of Religions by Einar Thomassen and Michel Despland

Volume L, 1

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YOU MUST NOT ADD ANYTHING TO WHAT I COMMAND YOU:
PARADOXES OF CANON AND AUTHORSHIP
IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

BERNARD M. LEVINSON

Abstract

For all the debate in the contemporary humanities about the canon, there is little interdisciplinary dialogue on the issue, nor even meaningful input from the perspective of academic biblical studies, the one discipline that specializes in the formation and interpretation of the canon. Seeking to provide such a perspective, this article shows how cultures having a tradition of prestigious or authoritative texts address the problem of literary and legal innovation. Engaging the work of Jonathan Z. Smith on exegetical ingenuity, the study begins with cuneiform law, and then shows how ancient Israel's development of the idea of divine revelation of law creates a cluster of constraints that would be expected to impede legal revision or amendment. As a test-case, the article examines the idea that God punishes sinners transgenerationally, vicariously extending the punishment due them to three or four generations of their progeny. A series of inner-biblical and post-biblical responses to the rule demonstrates, however, that later writers were able to criticize, reject, and replace it with the alternative notion of individual retribution. The conclusions stress the extent to which the formative canon sponsors this kind of critical reflection and intellectual freedom.

The ideal does not always translate into the real. At just at the point where the speaker of Deuteronomy begins to propound a utopian program to eliminate poverty — “There shall be no one in need among you!” (Deut. 15:4) — he quickly pulls himself back to earth to confront the gap between vision and reality: “If there is one in need among you...” (Deut. 15:7). Utopian vision and pragmatic preparation are here separated only by a single word, since the Hebrew phrases involved are otherwise identical.¹ The same particle that adds declama-

¹ Precisely that similarity of construction points to an editorial interpolation. From an historical-critical point of view, the statement in Deut. 15:4 is most likely

tory force to the initial assertion (וְכֵן) is also the one that forms the later conditional statement. As with the ancient text, so with contemporary scholarship, where the dividing line between utopian vision and pragmatic reality hinges on a single word. In an ideal world, the concept of “canon” might provide a meeting point for the humanities. It would offer a bridge between the multiple, separate disciplines that operate, more or less explicitly, with canonical collections of texts and even canonical methods of research. The reality, however, is that, even as the separate disciplines actively reassess their canons—the intellectual and historical forces that defined their canons, the ideologies and biases encoded in those canons, the degree of adaptability of those canons, and the extent to which they promote or inhibit cultural change and intellectual renewal—there is a striking absence of dialogue between disciplines, precisely on the canon as the common point of ferment.

Even more striking than this lack of interdisciplinary dialogue is the failure of contemporary theory (including literary theory, post-modernism, and post-colonial scholarship) to engage with academic Biblical Studies.² Literary theory’s infatuation with ancient Jewish midrash is no exception. It romanticizes rabbinic hermeneutics as championing radical textual indeterminacy, and thus heralds the ancient rabbis as the precursors of modern critical trends.³ By disregard-

the work of a later editor, stressing the benefits that follow from obedience to the Torah, supplementing but also contradicting the original text, whereby Deut. 15:7 would have been the continuation of Deut. 15:3. See, conveniently, A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (New Century Bible Commentary), London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott 1979, 248. With the insertion marked by its close correspondence to the original text, at issue is a variation of a formal scribal technique, the “repetitive resumption” or *Wiederaufnahme*, as a marker of editorial activity.

² As noted by Jonathan Z. Smith, “Canons, Catalogues and Classics,” in *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden, 9–10 January 1997* (Numen Studies in the History of Religions 82), ed. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn, Leiden: Brill 1998, 295–311 (at 295–96).

³ See *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, New Haven: Yale University Press 1986.

ing the importance of law and privileging narrative, that approach completely distorts the priorities of classical rabbinic interpretation, and thus amounts to a projection.⁴ Of course, a projection always involves a repression, one that seems to apply more broadly in this case. It cannot simply be an accident that, at the precise moment when the canon has become such a point of contention in the humanities, critically absent from the discussion is academic biblical studies: the one discipline devoted to exploring what a canon is, how it emerges historically, how its texts relate to one another, and how it effects the community that espouses it. The same omission in comparative research on scripture by academic religious studies, the sister discipline of biblical studies, only doubles the irony.⁵

⁴ See Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990, 35–38; David Stern, “Literary Criticism or Literary Homilies? Susan Handelman and the Contemporary Study of Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 5 (1985) 96–103; *id.*, “Midrash and Hermeneutics: Polysemy vs. Indeterminacy,” in *id.*, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1996, 15–38; and Azzan Yadin, “The Hammer on the Rock: Polysemy and the School of Rabbi Ishmael” (forthcoming).

⁵ That gap is preserved in the otherwise valuable collection, *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Miriam Levering, Albany: State University of New York Press 1989. Despite the stated goal of rethinking older models, the volume inadvertently reifies older assumptions by using the completed canon of Scripture as its intellectual point of departure. The absence of a contribution by a biblical scholar ironically perpetuates the gap between the comparative study of religion and philological analysis of the scriptural sources of religion. Granted that Barbara A. Holdrege is justified to point out that “biblical and orientalist scholars . . . have focused on particular religious texts rather than on scripture as a general religious phenomenon” (“The Bride of Israel: The Ontological Status of Scripture in the Rabbinic and Kabbalistic Traditions,” in *Rethinking Scripture*, 180–261 [at 180]). Nonetheless, the opposite extreme also entails a risk. It makes the volume’s stated goal — recovering the immanent religiosity associated with texts in ancient Israel — methodologically impossible to achieve. Holdrege construes the ancient Israelite sources anachronistically from the perspective of how they are read by later Jewish tradition, as is evident by her describing the biblical Hymn to Wisdom (Prov. 8:22–31) as a “pre-Rabbinic text” (188). Note also Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1996.

The absence of dialogue with biblical studies impoverishes contemporary theory and deprives it of intellectual models that would actually advance its own project. German studies is a case in point. The more the discipline investigates its own history, the more salient is the missing dialogue with biblical studies. There was no German nation-state until the unification of the scores of German-speaking kingdoms, principalities, and free towns by Bismarck in 1871. But German writers and thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had already laid its groundwork through their promulgation of a common art, literature, and music that united German-speakers as a *Kulturnation*. Although not yet an independent political entity, therefore, the German nation already existed as a *Land der Dichter und Denker*.⁶ The nation was in effect created and sustained by its literary canon while it had no real unified political existence. That situation cries out for an exploration of the parallel with how the scriptural canon sustained “the People of the Book” for the two millennia of their life in the Diaspora. Moreover, the extent to which the classical past of the German literary canon is actually an ideological construction, an *ex post facto* product of deliberate shaping by later “editors” of that canon, only reinforces the relevance of the missing perspective of biblical studies, where such issues have long been recognized in the shaping of the canon. Using a range of techniques already well-honed by their ancient religious counterparts, therefore, German literary historians of the nineteenth century modified medieval manuscripts before publication, excised early “Frenchified” novels from their studies, and sanctified works by Goethe and Schiller as classic, all in order to “recover” a “true” German character unsullied by any influences too foreign, modern, or feminine.⁷ The ancient and the more modern editors may differ significantly in ideology but they employ strikingly similar techniques (literary and linguistic

⁶ Thus the French writer and traveler, Mme Anne Louise de Stael (1766–1817), in her influential, *De l'Allemagne* (1810).

⁷ For the discipline's struggles with this legacy, see *Rethinking “Germanistik”: Canon and Culture*, ed. R. Bledsoe et al., New York: Peter Lang 1991. I thank Ms Blythe Inners (Minnesota) for assistance with this analogy.

selectivity) to pursue a strikingly common end: the creation of a pristine past that can serve as an enduring charter.

In addition to intellectual models, there is something more fundamental at stake. With its historical approach, biblical studies provides a way of critically engaging the ideological assumptions of contemporary theory, whose concerns with the canon are certainly understandable: for being exclusive; for allegedly encoding class, race, or gender bias; for silencing competing or less prestigious voices; for eliminating difference; for arresting social change; for enshrining privilege. Yet in all such cases, the canon is taken to be a self-sufficient, unchanging entity, one that properly demands deconstruction, if not complete rejection. But in being read that way, the deconstruction of the canon itself entails an alternative construction: for the canon is conceptualized ahistorically from the perspective of the present, whereby the canon is closed, both literally and metaphorically. That approach remains blind to its own lack of historical ground. It locates critique external to the canon by transforming the canon into a lifeless literary fossil. The contrary premise here is that critical theory is not at odds with the canon but central to the canon and sanctioned by it.⁸ There is no priority of completed, authoritative canon to human critical engagement with the canon, either chronologically or ontologically. Properly understood, the canon is radically open: it models critique and embeds theory. In order to recover that absent perspective, this article seeks to open the conversation between biblical studies and the humanities.

I. Innovation and the Problem of the Canon

The idea of a scriptural canon is one of the most distinctive achievements of many major religions, both Western (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islām) and Eastern (the Pāli canon of

⁸ See Herbert N. Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1977; Brayton Polka, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence*, New York and London: St. Martin's 1986; and *id.*, *Truth and Interpretation: An Essay in Thinking*, New York: St. Martin's; London: Macmillan 1990.

Theravāda Buddhism).⁹ By locating its font of revelation or contemplative insight in foundational sources, however, a culture confronts an almost inevitable difficulty. The essence of a canon is that it be stable, self-sufficient, and delimited. As Moses twice admonished his addressees in Deuteronomy: “You must not add anything to what I command you nor take anything away from it, but shall keep the commandments of Yahweh your God” (Deut. 4:2; similarly 13:1 [English, 12:32]). In the Bible, this so-called “canon formula” occurs primarily in the context of Israelite wisdom literature (Qoh. 3:14; 12:12–13; cf. Sir. 42:21; Rev. 22:18–19). The association with any notion of canon, however, marks a post-biblical development. The formula actually has a long pre-history in the ancient Near East, where it originally sought to prevent royal inscriptions, including law collections and treaties (cf. 1 Macc. 8:30), from being altered. In other contexts, it affirmed the adequacy of wisdom instruction.¹⁰ Only subsequently was it taken over

⁹ For a valuable comparative perspective, see *Canonization and Decanonization* (cited n. 2 above).

¹⁰ Adducing comparative material, see Johannes Leipoldt and Siegfried Morenz, *Heilige Schriften: Betrachtungen zur Religionsgeschichte der antiken Mittelmeerwelt*, Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1953, 53–65 (stressing the origins of the formula in Egyptian wisdom literature); Nahum M. Sarna, “Psalm 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis,” in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Brandeis University Studies and Texts 1), Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1963, 29–34, reprinted in *id.*, *Studies in Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 2000, 377–94 (stressing precedents in cuneiform literature); Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, Oxford: Clarendon 1972, 261–65 (with a wide range of Near Eastern and Egyptian parallels); Michael Fishbane, “Varia Deuteronomica,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972) 349–52; Eleonore Reuter, “‘Nimm nichts davon weg und füge nichts hinzu’: Dtn 13,1, seine alttestamentlichen Parallelen und seine altorientalischen Vorbilder,” *Biblische Notizen* 47 (1989) 107–14; and Christoph Dohmen and Manfred Oeming, *Biblischer Kanon: Warum und Wozu? Eine Kanontheologie* (Quaestiones disputatae 137), Freiburg: Herder 1992, 68–89; Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (Anchor Bible 18C), New York: Doubleday 1997, 388, 394 (stressing that the formula’s original intent was not to delimit a corpus of texts as canonical but to emphasize “the sufficiency of the text”).

by Deuteronomy's Israelite authors and applied to the Mosaic Torah.¹¹ The formula makes it clear that its intent is to preclude both literary and doctrinal innovation by safeguarding the textual status quo.¹²

With such fixity and textual sufficiency as its hallmarks, how can a canon be made to address the varying needs of later generations of religious communities? These later generations face the conflicting imperatives of subsuming their lives to the authority of the canon while adapting that unchangeable canon to realities of social, economic, political, and intellectual life never contemplated at the time of its composition. Among the vicissitudes not contemplated by the canons foundational to the three major Western monotheisms are, for example, for Judaism, the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. that rendered impossible the sacrificial cultus essential to Israelite religion; for Christianity, a Messiah who failed to return, although that return in eschatological Parousia had been expected to be imminent; and, for Islām, the death of Muḥammad, the community's founder and prophetic leader, without his having appointed a successor. Of course, the theology of *O felix culpa* extends to the history of religions, where crisis may engender a productive innovation. The triumph of Pharisaic Judaism as the dominant form of Judaism, with the claim that its teachings derive by oral transmission from Sinaitic revelation; the consolidation of the Church in doctrine, organization, and admission of gentiles; and the separate developments of Sunni and Shī'ī Islām are in many ways the results of just those cases where the scriptural canon was faced with historical circumstances that threatened its viability.

¹¹ See Bernard M. Levinson, "The Neo-Assyrian Origins of Deuteronomy's 'Canon Formula,'" (forthcoming).

¹² Deuteronomy's appeal for fidelity to the legal status quo (Deut. 13:1) immediately follows a passage in which the authors have radically transformed prior religious law by demanding the restriction of all sacrifice to the central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12). The canon formula's use in that context, in effect functioning as a colophon to Deuteronomy's radically innovative law of centralization, is therefore paradoxical. See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Clarendon 1985, 79, 263; and Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1997, 48.

If the closed literary canon as the repository of revelation or insight is the source of stability for a religious tradition, exegesis provides vitality. By exegesis or hermeneutics I mean the range of interpretive strategies designed to extend the application of a given canon to the whole of life, even to circumstances not originally contemplated by the canon itself. By means of exegesis, the textually finite canon becomes infinite in its application. One of the chief means, therefore, by which a religious tradition demonstrates its creativity is the variety of ways it finds to accommodate itself to and overcome an authoritative yet textually-delimited canon.¹³ Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that the dialectical interplay between canonical delimitation and exegetical expansion should be made central to the study of the History of Religions. He stresses that what he felicitously terms “exegetical ingenuity” represents “that most characteristic, persistent and obsessive religious activity.”¹⁴ That interplay—conflict might be the better word—between canonical constraint and exegetical ingenuity also took place within ancient Israel. But it is necessary to go beyond Smith’s model in two key ways in order to see how.

¹³ “Canonical criticism” in Biblical Studies has valuably emphasized the importance of the formative canon to Israelite religion as a repository of the nation’s identity. See James A. Sanders, “‘Adaptable for Life’: The Nature and Function of Canon,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God. Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke, and P.D. Miller, Jr.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. 1976, 531–60; reprinted with a foreword in James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm*, Philadelphia: Fortress 1987, 9–39. In this understanding, subsequent generations could draw on the canon and apply it to new historical crises. Despite this proper emphasis, however, the approach tends to overlook the hermeneutical problematic inherent in just that reinterpretation and reapplication of the canon. It overlooks also the extent to which the reformulated texts challenge the authority and break down the coherence of the original texts; see Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 13–15.

¹⁴ See Jonathan Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon,” in *id.*, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism), Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1982, 36–52 (at 48). See Smith’s further reflections on that study in *id.*, “Canons, Catalogues and Classics,” in *Canonization and Decanonization* (see n. 2 above), 303–309.

First, the creativity of exegesis consists not only in its ability to adjust to new circumstances not contemplated by the canon but also in the interpreter's claim that there is no innovative or transformative activity involved whatsoever: the interpreter merely elucidates the plenitude of truth already latent in the canon. Within Jewish intellectual history, for example, Gershom Scholem has shown how each successive transformation of tradition presents itself as implicit in and consistent with, rather than as a departure from, the original canon.¹⁵ The rabbis themselves seem to have recognized the burden that they placed upon Sinai when they spoke of the Mishna's elaborately codified system of Sabbath laws as a mountain suspended by a slim scriptural thread.¹⁶ While it is a profound instrument of cultural renewal, exegesis is consequently also often profoundly a study in the "false consciousness" of the interpreter, who disclaims the very historical agency that, for Smith, makes exegesis worthy of study!

The second issue is that Smith's model presumes that exegetical ingenuity takes place subsequent to the formation of a closed canon.¹⁷ By implication, the canon is only subject to hermeneutical reapplication after its closure; alternatively, the canon is only a hermeneutical problem post-canonically.¹⁸ Such a seemingly self-evident presupposition, however, leaves unexamined the hermeneutical dynamics that operate within a culture prior to the closure of a literary canon. It is

¹⁵ See Gershom Scholem, "Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism," in *id.*, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, New York: Schocken 1971, 282–303.

¹⁶ "The laws of the Sabbath are like mountains hanging by a hair, for they consist of little Bible and many laws" (*m. Hagigah* 1:8).

¹⁷ Smith, "Sacred Persistence," 48.

¹⁸ Such a presupposition is also evident in Haim H. Cohn's analysis of the ingenious ploys used in rabbinic exegesis to transform biblical law while seeming nonetheless to honor its authoritative status; see *id.*, "Legal Change in Unchangeable Law: The Talmudical Pattern," in *Legal Change: Essays in Honour of Julius Stone*, ed. A.R. Blackshield, Sydney: Butterworths 1983, 10–33. His valuable study restricts the operation of such ingenuity to the post-biblical stage while overlooking the operation of similar stratagems within biblical law itself.

essential to understand that the ingenuity of the interpreter operates even in the formative period of the canon, while those texts that will subsequently win authoritative status are still being composed and collected. The stakes here are important, since Smith's model in effect posits a hierarchy between canon and interpretation. That hierarchy is untenable.¹⁹

That much is implicitly clear because of the contributions of the "inner-biblical exegesis" approach to biblical studies over the last two decades, which has become associated in particular with Michael Fishbane and James L. Kugel.²⁰ This "hermeneutical" turn has contributed

¹⁹ For example, as Richard E. Palmer reflects on the scene where the resurrected Jesus derives the necessity of a suffering Messiah from "Moses and the Prophets" (Luke 24:25–27), he takes at face value the statement by the Lukan narrator that Jesus "interpreted" the Hebrew Bible (*Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* [Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy], Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1969, 23–24). Palmer uses the scene as a paradigm for the work of the modern reader, who must revivify the otherwise inert ancient text. In reading the text literally, however, Palmer fails to see that the Gospel text is itself already a sophisticated product of hermeneutics. The author of Luke here provides a narrative *apologia* both for the concept of a Messiah who suffers and for the christological reading of the Hebrew Bible as an Old Testament. The Lukan author thus reads hermeneutical constructions of Jesus by the later Church back into Jesus as the protagonist of the Gospel narrative. The ancient text is not merely a "Valley of Dry Bones" without an infusion of life by contemporary theory. The true beginning point of this Gospel narrative is not the oral life Palmer hopes to recover but the hermeneutics of the Lukan author. Modern hermeneutical theory is here inadequate to the theory already implicit in the ancient text. More recently, Werner G. Jeanrond still views both interpretation and reception as theological categories separate from and subsequent to the composition of the text (*Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, New York: Crossroad 1988). Contrast the strong conception of hermeneutics as provided by Brayton Polka, *Truth and Interpretation: An Essay in Thinking*, New York: St. Martin's 1990.

²⁰ See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Clarendon 1985; James L. Kugel, "Early Interpretation: The Common Background of Late Forms of Biblical Exegesis," in *Early Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J.L. Kugel and R. Greer, Philadelphia: Westminster 1986, 9–106; and *id.*, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Cambridge: Har-

an important new perspective to the discipline by emphasizing the textuality of scripture, demonstrating the role of texts in the culture of ancient Israel and the Second Temple period, and by recognizing how ancient writers sought to explain, respond to, and challenge older texts that had already won cultural prestige. At the same time, both scholars leave some questions unexplored.²¹ In particular, the implications of this approach for a broader theory of canon have not been probed. Part of the difficulty is that Biblical Studies remains riven between

vard University Press 1998. Helping pioneer this approach were, among others, Sarna, "Psalm 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis" (see n. 10 above); and Jacob Weingreen, *From Bible to Mishna: The Continuity of Tradition*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1976. As evidence of the diffusion of this approach, see Yair Zakovitch, *An Introduction to Inner-Biblical Interpretation*, Even Yehudah: Rekhes 1992 (Hebrew); and Eckart Otto, "Innerbiblische Exegese im Heiligtumsgesetz Levitikus 17–26," in *Levitikus als Buch* (Bonner biblische Beiträge 119), ed. H.-J. Fabry and H.-W. Jüngling, Berlin: Philo 1999, 125–96.

²¹ Fishbane shows the close ties of Israelite literature to the scribal and intellectual traditions of the ancient Near East, demonstrating its sophistication, while thereby also contextualizing some of the techniques employed in later rabbinic exegesis. At the same time, it sometimes remains unclear how the approach relates to conventional models in biblical studies or what criteria control the direction of literary influence claimed between texts. Note Kugel's thoughtful review, "The Bible's Earliest Interpreters," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987) 269–83. Kugel's own work brilliantly shows how a wide range of Second Temple and classical rabbinic, Church, and Islamic literature responds to ambiguities, redundancies, or inconsistencies in the biblical text and seeks to resolve or embellish them. Inexplicably, however, this hermeneutical model is applied only to post-biblical literature in relation to the Bible as an already-formed, complete, authoritative, "canonical" text. Whether the same model might supplement the standard documentary hypothesis and prove useful for understanding the classical literary history of ancient Israel, including the formation of the Pentateuch, is not explored. The situation that results ironically brings to mind the intellectual safeguards that nineteenth century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* imposed upon itself. For example, Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) freely applied both higher and lower criticism to the Prophets and Hagiographa. "Nevertheless, he refused to apply the same to the Pentateuch, and he insisted on the unity and pre-exilic origins of the entire Torah." See Nahum M. Sarna, "Abraham Geiger and Biblical Scholarship" [1975], reprinted in *id.*, *Studies in Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 2000, 161–72 (at 163).

practitioners of synchronic and diachronic method, so that those concerned with meaning and theory are often not in dialogue with those whose focus is philological rigor. This essay attempts to encourage such dialogue, and to show the productivity of this approach for theoretical work in other disciplines. I therefore argue the following theses: (1) that exegesis provides a strategy for religious renewal; (2) that renewal and innovation are almost always covert rather than explicit in ancient Israel; (3) that in many cases exegesis involves not the passive explication but the radical subversion of prior authoritative texts; and (4) that these phenomena operated in the literature of ancient Israel before the closure of the canon.

II. Innovation Within the Formative Canon

The concept of divine revelation of law distinguishes Israelite religion from all of the other religions of the ancient Near East. According to this concept, Yahweh publicly reveals his will to Israel in the form of cultic, civil, and ethical law, obedience to which becomes the condition for the nation's proper relationship to God and possession of the promised land of Canaan. The most dramatic account of this legal revelation occurs when God, from the top of Mount Sinai, proclaims the Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel gathered at the base of the mountain, trembling in fear of the thunderous divine voice (Exodus 19–20). But it is not the Ten Commandments alone that the Hebrew Bible ascribes to divine revelation. By means of a redactional tour de force, the entire legal corpus of the Pentateuch, in effect all biblical law, is either attributed directly to God or indirectly to him through Moses, his prophetic intermediary.²²

1. The Legacy of Cuneiform Law

Despite this claim by Israelite authors for the divine origin of the legal collections, the archaeological remains of the ancient Near

²² Ezekiel's vision of the restored Jerusalem and its temple (Ezekiel 40–48) represents a variation of this paradigm. Law continues to be revealed by God through the mediation of a prophet: the corpus of law that is to govern the community after its return from exile here derives its authority from a new prophetic revelation.

East preclude any notion of *lex ex nihilo*. The Near East bequeathed to ancient Israel a prestigious literary genre, the legal collection, that originated in the scribal schools (or E.DUB.BA) of late third millennium Sumer and then spread up the Fertile Crescent through Babylon and Assyria into Anatolia and the Hittite Empire. Since the discovery of Hammurabi's famous "Code" in 1901, about a dozen different cuneiform legal collections have been discovered, written in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite, and ranging from school exercises to extended, formal compositions. Despite the ostensible legal form, these texts were much closer to literature or philosophy than to actual law in the modern sense.²³ On the one hand, Hammurabi's Code won such cultural prestige that it was recopied for more than a millennium after its composition in roughly 1755 B.C.E., and was included by the Neo-Assyrian King Assurbanipal in his library of cultural classics at Nineveh (ca. 660 B.C.E.). On the other hand, there is no evidence for its ever having been implemented as actual law, let alone for its being cited as prescriptive, in any of the hundreds of thousands of actual court dockets that survive from the Old Babylonian period.²⁴

The biblical legal collections share many detailed points of contact with this cuneiform material in technical terminology, formulation, and legal topos. In particular, Israelite scribes learned from the cuneiform model the generic convention of framing the series of legal provisions with a literary prologue and epilogue in which a royal speaker claims

²³ On the academic nature of the legal collection, see Benno Landsberger, "Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt," *Islamica* 2 (1926) 355–72, at 370–71; F.R. Kraus, "Ein zentrales Problem des altnesopotamischen Rechts: Was ist der Codex Hammurabi," *Genava* 8 (1960) 283–96 (at 288, 293); R. Westbrook, "Biblical and Cuneiform Law Codes," *Revue biblique* 92 (1985) 247–64; and, especially, Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992, 156–84.

²⁴ Raymond Westbrook attempts to recover some practical role for the literary law collections in actual legal practice. He posits that they "were a reference work for consultation by judges when deciding difficult legal cases" (*id.*, "Law Codes," 254). The difficulty, as he properly concedes, is that "there is no direct evidence" to support this hypothesis (*loc. cit.*).

responsibility for promulgating the laws. Using the categories of literary criticism, one might say that these legal collections were given a textual voice by means of such a frame, which put them into the mouth of the reigning monarch. It is not that the divine is unconnected to law in the cuneiform material. Shamash, the Mesopotamian sun god who is the custodian of the cosmic principles of justice, grants King Hammurabi the ability to perceive these eternal truths. Nonetheless, the laws in their actual formulation are royal. Hammurabi repeatedly boasts that the laws are *awâtīya ša ina narīya aššuru*, “my pronouncements, which *I* have inscribed on *my* stela” (xlix 3–4, 19–21). He refers to them as *awâtīya šūqurātīm*, “my precious pronouncements” (xlviii 12–13), and insists, *awâtūa nasqā*, “my pronouncements are choice” (xlviii 99).²⁵ Confronted by the convention of the royal voicing of law, Israelite authors pushed the genre in a different direction. When King Lear, on the storm-driven heath, was asked by blinded Gloucester for his hand to kiss it in poignant greeting, Lear demurred: “Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality” (IV.6.133).²⁶ As Israelite authors turned their hand to law, they wiped the genre clean of mortality by transforming the royal speaker from a human monarch into their divine king, Yahweh.

With that troping of convention, Israelite scribes introduced into the ancient world a new idea: the divine revelation of law. Accordingly it was not the legal collection as a literary genre but the voicing of publicly revealed law as the personal will of God that was unique to

²⁵ On this aspect of the Laws of Hammurabi, see the important study of the contrasting ethics of cuneiform and biblical law by Moshe Greenberg, “Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law,” in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Haran, Jerusalem: Magnes 1960, 5–28; reprinted in *id.*, *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1995, 25–50. In translation, the Laws of Hammurabi are most conveniently available in the excellent edition of Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Society of Biblical Literature: Writings from the Ancient World 6), 2nd ed., Atlanta: Scholars Press 1997, 71–142 (at 134–36).

²⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. G.B. Harrison, Middlesex: Penguin 1964, 112.

ancient Israel.²⁷ That trope of divine revelation had a far-reaching impact upon the literary and intellectual life of ancient Israel. There is a clear relationship between textual voice and textual authority, so that attributing a legal text to God literally gives that text ultimate authority. So strongly was the divine voice privileged as *the* authoritative voice of law that it preempted the emergence to independent dignity of explicitly human legal compositions. Just as there is not a single law in the Bible that Israelite authors do not attribute to God or his prophetic intermediary, Moses, so is the converse also true. In the entire Hebrew Bible, not a single text, legal or otherwise, is definitively attributed to the actual scribe responsible for its composition. Except for the prophets, biblical authors never speak explicitly in their own voice. Instead, they employ pseudonyms or write anonymously. Proverbs, for example, is attributed to Solomon by means of its editorial superscription (Prov. 1:1), while Ecclesiastes is similarly ascribed to “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Qoh. 1:1). Neither of these attributions withstands critical examination.²⁸ Such attributions seem rather to function to lend greater authority or prestige to a literary composition by associating it with a venerable figure from the past: a royal exemplar of the wisdom tradition (1 Kgs. 3:28; 4:29–34).

If the notion of divine revelation of law opened up new intellectual and social possibilities, it equally shut down others. The technique of lending ultimate authority to law by attributing it to a divine author raises the question of the relative authority of the human legislator. In a legal and literary culture where the divine or prophetic voice has pride of place, what is the place of the human voice? The concept of divine

²⁷ This notion of divine revelation of law constitutes a crucial component of what Karl Jaspers termed the “Axial Age” breakthrough achieved by ancient Israel (*Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, Munich: Piper 1949, 15–106). Separate essays assess ancient Israel and Mesopotamia from this perspective in the comparative volume by S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1986.

²⁸ For a summary of the critical issues involved, see J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Old Testament Library), 3rd ed., Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press 1989, 445–47, 462–64.

revelation presents special difficulties for the problem of innovation. As noted earlier, in any culture, social, economic, and intellectual change occurs over time. How does a culture with a concept of divine revelation address the problem of legal change? How can legal texts, once viewed as divinely revealed, be revised to fit new circumstances without compromising their — or God's — authority? In order to make the case of the Bible as distinctive as possible, I will first demonstrate how a culture in which there is no concept of divine revelation resolves the problem of legal change.

The Hittite Laws, arranged on two tablets of one hundred laws each, were discovered in 1906 at Boghazköy in central Turkey. That city had served as the capital of the Hittite Empire, which flourished in Anatolia from approximately 1700–1200 B.C.E.²⁹ The laws were found in a royal archive. Although originally dating to the middle of the second millennium, they were recopied for several centuries thereafter; the copies actually unearthed date from about 1325–1200 B.C.E. Two aspects of the Hittite Laws make them of particular interest. First, they exist without a literary frame; they thus make no claims whatsoever about the authorship or origins of the legal text.³⁰ Second — precisely because they lack literary voicing — they reveal legal change and

²⁹ For a valuable survey of Hittite civilization, see O.R. Gurney, *The Hittites*, 2nd rev. ed., Harmondsworth: Penguin 1981.

³⁰ For a legal-historical study of the function of the literary frame in cuneiform, biblical, Greek, and Roman laws, see G. Ries, *Prolog und Epilog in Gesetzen des Altertums* (Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und Antiken Rechtsgeschichte 76), Munich: C.H. Beck 1983. It should be noted that some copies of Hammurabi's Code exist without the literary frame; moreover, a version of the prologue has also been discovered without the laws. There has resulted some discussion of which is compositionally prior, the frame or the laws, and whether the combination of the two is original or a result of secondary redaction. Such issues are important to address in order to determine the literary history and the nature and function of the legal collection within Near Eastern culture. On the redactional relation between frame and legal corpus, see J.H. Tigay, "The Stylistic Criterion of Source Criticism in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern and Postbiblical Literature," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. J.H. Tigay, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1985, 155–58; and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Inu Anum šīrum": *Literary Structures in the Non-*

development openly. During their long period of recopying, they underwent not only linguistic updating but also revision in the nature and the severity of the penalties they prescribe. The formulation of the laws makes this process of revision explicit.³¹ For example, one of the laws governing personal assault reads as follows:

If anyone blinds a free person or knocks his teeth out, *formerly* (*karū*) they would pay 40 sheqels of silver, *but now* (*kinuna*) one pays 20 sheqels of silver... (Hittite Laws §7)³²

The legal speaker makes a clear distinction between what was formerly the case and what is now the case, between what would have been done and what is currently the practice. This opposition is marked grammatically: there is a shift from the durative-iterative form of the verb to the present tense. The new fine is only half the original one. The same formula is used to revise twenty-three of the two hundred Hittite Laws, nearly twelve percent of them.³³ Moreover, the revision and updating of older law continued to occur after the codification of

Juridical Sections of Codex Hammurabi (Philadelphia: Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 15), 1994, 90–103.

³¹ On this issue, see E. Neufeld, *The Hittite Laws*, London: Luzac & Co. 1951, 95–101; V. Korošec, “Le Problème de la Codification dans le Domaine du Droit Hittite,” *Revue internationale des droits de l’antiquité* 4 (1957) 93–105; and the articles by Raymond Westbrook (“What is the Covenant Code?”), Samuel Greengus (“Some Issues Relating to the Comparability of Laws and the Coherence of the Legal Tradition”), and Eckart Otto (“Aspects of Legal Reforms and Reformulations in Ancient Cuneiform and Israelite Law”) in *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law: Revision, Interpolation and Development* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements 181), ed. Bernard M. Levinson, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1994, 22–28, 62–72, 175–82.

³² My translation departs slightly from that in the excellent recent edition by Henry Angier Hoffner, Jr., *The Laws of the Hittites: A Critical Edition* (Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 23), Leiden: Brill 1997, 21.

³³ This formula occurs in the Hittite Laws §§7, 9, 19, 25, 51, 54, 57, 58, 59, 63, 67, 69, 81, 91, 92, 94, 101, 119, 121, 122, 123 (fragmentary text), 129, 166–167. For suggestive parallels to the Hittite formulary in Rabbinic and Roman law, see Martin S. Jaffee, “The Taqqanah in Tannaitic Literature: Jurisprudence and the Construction of Rabbinic Memory,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990) 204–25.

this text. A later copy further reduces or revises the fines, while also reorganizing the sequence of some of the laws. This updated version, however, deletes all reference to the older penalties; they are simply ignored as obsolete.³⁴ In this version, the fine for knocking the teeth out has been reduced to 12 sheqels, and a class distinction has been introduced: if the injured party is a slave, the fine is only half that amount.³⁵

If legal amendment repeatedly manifests itself within a century or two of the original codification of the Hittite Laws, similar kinds of revision would naturally be expected to take place in ancient Israel, whose literature spans nearly one thousand years.³⁶ The wrenching shifts in economy, social structure, political organization, and religion that Israel underwent in this period only increase the likelihood that legal amendment should occur. Nonetheless, the Hebrew Bible reveals

³⁴ Most valuable is the edition by R. Haase, which presents this latest version of the laws separately, as an independent work; see *id.*, *Die Keilschriftlichen Rechtssammlungen in Deutscher Fassung*, 2nd ed., Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1979, 67–91. The more common form of publication obscures the independence of that version by blending it back into the earlier version that it seeks to update and replace. What results is an “eclectic text” that never existed in antiquity, whereby the later version’s individual stipulations are appended to the pertinent ones of the main version, and identified as “Late(r) Version.” Such is the approach of A. Goetze, tr., “The Hittite Laws,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J.B. Pritchard, 3rd ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 188–97; and Hoffner, *Laws of the Hittites*.

³⁵ See Hoffner, *Laws of the Hittites*, 22 (§VII). The changes marked by the “formerly . . . but now” formula derive from a far-reaching legal reform, carried out under King Telipinu (ca. 1525–1500 B.C.E.), of a version of the laws codified a century or two earlier in the Hittite Old Kingdom. The parallel text preserving the latest version was prepared a century or two afterward (Hoffner, *Laws of the Hittites*, 221).

³⁶ The dating of the biblical literary sources is complex. The dates here extend from the Yahwist, generally considered the oldest documentary source of the Pentateuch (although certain poetry may be older), to the Book of Daniel, the latest book to enter the canon of the Hebrew Bible. For trends in the dating and analysis of biblical literature, see *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (Society of Biblical Literature: The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters 1), ed. D.A. Knight and G.M. Tucker, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985.

a remarkable absence of explicit evidence for the revision and updating of Pentateuchal law.³⁷ The one clear case of explicit legal revision in the Hebrew Bible deals not with revealed law but with custom.

2. Legal History as Explicit in Ruth

The superscription to the book of Ruth places it in the ancient period of the Israelite settlement in Canaan, prior to the emergence of the monarchy: “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). That superscription almost certainly accounts for the book’s being placed by the Septuagint (and thus, still, in Catholic and Protestant Bibles) immediately after the book of Judges, so as literally to come before the introduction of the monarchy (1–2 Samuel). Despite its narrative setting in antiquity, most scholars would date Ruth, on the basis of its language, to the post-exilic period of the reconstruction, when, under Persian sovereignty, there was no longer a Judaeon monarchy.³⁸ From that vantage point, the literary setting of Ruth rather represents an attempt at conscious archaizing. The theme of the book (the integration of a Moabite into “Israel” by means of

³⁷ There are four cases within the Pentateuch of new divine oracles, mediated by Moses, which supplement the existing provisions of covenantal law with judicial adjustments to unforeseen circumstances (Lev. 24:10–23; Num. 9:6–14; 15:32–36; 27:1–11). In these instances, the earlier law is not revoked; instead, given particular unforeseen eventualities, a divine oracle is represented as allowing Moses to render a judgment. The very *ad hoc* nature of these situations makes them the exception that proves the rule. For an astute analysis of these passages, see Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 98–102. A dissertation by Simeon Chavel currently underway at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem explores these cases in further detail.

³⁸ See Jean-Luc Vesco, “La Date du Livre de Ruth,” *Revue biblique* 74 (1967) 245–47. Maintaining a Josianic date (just prior to the exile) and providing a valuable survey of the issues, is Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, 2nd ed., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1989, 240–52. Good arguments also exist for a post-exilic setting. Arguing for the Persian period, see Christian Frevel, *Das Buch Ruth* (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar: Altes Testament 6), Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk 1992, 34. Advocating a Hellenistic setting, see Erich Zenger, *Das Buch Ruth* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare: Altes Testament 8), 2nd ed., Zürich: Theologischer Verlag 1992, 28.

marriage) engages a much larger debate concerning ethnicity and identity reflected within Second Temple period literature. Other texts, set explicitly in the Persian period, show how contested and divisive such issues were, as those who returned from exile sought to constitute themselves as a new Israel organized around a rebuilt Temple. Ezra and Nehemiah, for example, drew a firm boundary line of ethnicity around the emergent community. They took an exclusivist stance, urging expulsion of foreigners, rejecting integration through marriage (Ezra 9–10).³⁹ If Ezra's policies were tendentiously cast as the intent of ancient scriptural tradition, so, conversely, do the policies of Ruth's authors receive the warrant of ancient tradition: they are cast as an ancient folktale, set in the period of the Israelite settlement. In contrast to Ezra's exclusionist stance, however, the authors of the book of Ruth promote a porous view of the community's boundaries: they sanction inclusion through marriage.⁴⁰ This policy receives final warrant in the genealogy that concludes the book: David—the founder of a dynasty, and Israel's greatest king—is the son of Jesse, the issue of this marriage between Israelite Boaz and Moabite Ruth (Ruth 4:17–22). The literary setting of Ruth thus represents an argument addressed to a post-exilic audience about the boundaries of the community. Narrative time here serves as a literary trope to justify an argument about ethnicity and cultural identity.

At a pivotal point in the plot, the historical distance between the book's literary setting and the actual date of its composition (and thus of its intended readership) becomes clear. Boaz cannot legally marry Ruth until a nearer kinsman publicly surrenders his prior claim. Boaz

³⁹ See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 114–29.

⁴⁰ Prophetic literature enters into the same debate. Ezekiel 44 advances an exclusivist position while Trito-Isaiah argues for the inclusion of the foreigner within the community (Isa. 56:3–8). Discussing the “clash of interpretations” represented by Ezek. 44: 6–9 and Isa. 56:4–7, see Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 138–43; and Joachim Schaper, “Re-reading the Law: Inner-biblical Exegesis and Divine Oracles,” in *Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament: Studies in German and English in Honor of Gerhard von Rad* (Altes Testament und Moderne 16), ed. Bernard M. Levinson and Eckart Otto, Münster/London: LIT 2002, forthcoming.

thus calls this kinsman to a legal ceremony held before the elders at the village gate, the traditional site of public justice in the ancient Near East.⁴¹ The details of the ceremony are presented in a chess-like verbal exchange whereby Boaz first invites the kinsman to exercise his right to redeem an ancestral plot of land. The solicitation secures the kinsman's initial interest (Ruth 4:3–4a). Only after the kinsman confirms his intent to acquire the land does Boaz reveal what he has not yet mentioned. Were the kinsman to assert the right of redemption of ancestral land, he is also obliged, consistent with the rules of levirate marriage, to espouse Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law (Ruth 4:5). But the convention of levirate marriage is that the progeny continue the line and the estate of the deceased husband, not of the new husband, or *levir*. Faced thereby with economic double jeopardy — payment for land that would not increase his estate but rather transfer out of it — the kinsman declines the offer. As intended, he cedes the right of land

⁴¹ For the role of the elders in the administration of justice, see Moshe Weinfeld, "Elders," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica 1972, 6:578–80; Leslie J. Hoppe, *The Origins of Deuteronomy*, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms 1978; *id.*, "Elders and Deuteronomy," *Église et Théologie* 14 (1983) 259–72; Joachim Buchholz, *Die Ältesten Israels im Deuteronomium* (Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten 36), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1988); Jan Christian Gertz, *Die Gerichtsorganisation Israels im deuteronomischen Gesetz* (Forschungen zur Religion des Alten und Neuen Testaments 165); Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1994, 173–225; Hanoch Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution*, Jerusalem: Magnes 1989, 61–70 (whose analysis, however, does not address essential diachronic issues); and Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 124–26. On the village gate as the site of public trials (note also Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7), see Victor H. Matthews, "Entrance Ways and Threshing Floors: Legally Significant Sites in the Ancient Near East," *Fides et Historia* 19 (1987) 25–40; and Eckart Otto, "שער *ša'ar*," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1995, 8:358–403.

redemption — and thus of marriage — to Boaz.⁴² Just at this climax of the negotiations, an editor arrests the drama to observe:

Thus *formerly* it was done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man *would* take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practice in Israel. (Ruth 4:7)

Immediately following the annotation, the dramatic action resumes. What compelled the editor to interrupt the action at this point? The symbolic ritual of removing the sandal to mark the conclusion of the contract must have fallen into disuse. The annotation is inserted into the narrative for the benefit of the text's contemporary reader who would otherwise have found the archaic ritual unintelligible. Linguistic analysis of the annotation independently confirms its late date and its inconsistency with the temporal setting of the narrative.⁴³ The

⁴² The connection between the law of land redemption (Lev. 25:25–28; reflected also in Jer. 34:6–44) and that of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10; cf. Gen. 38:1–11) is that both share the common goal of retaining ancestral land within the clan and preventing its alienation through sale or marriage. These issues are assumed in the narrative of Ruth 4. By choosing to redeem the land, the nearer kinsman would return the property to the family and thus reactivate the possibility of continuing the dead man's line. Since the deceased's widow, Ruth, still survives, the kinsman as closest relative would be expected to assume the role of levir and thus of producing children for the deceased (Gen 38:9), to whom the redeemed property would transfer as their rightful inheritance. Although the kinsman is still technically the levir even before the land is redeemed, there is no point in raising children for the deceased in the absence of property for them to inherit. The deceased's "name" (cf. Deut. 25:6–7) is tied to the hereditary property and is lost without it (Ruth 4:5, 10). In the context of the narrative, the kinsman, informed by Boaz only of the land and thus initially unaware of Ruth's existence, agrees to redeem Naomi's land, assuming that it will become part of his own patrimony. Once Boaz discloses Ruth's existence and reminds him of the duty as levir that attaches to the land, the kinsman recognizes that redeeming the land would trigger a kind of estate law double-jeopardy: he would disadvantage himself by purchasing land that would ultimately be excluded from his patrimony (Ruth 4:6). For a lucid analysis, see Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements 113), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1991, 65–67.

⁴³ Establishing the "exilic/post-exilic" date of the editorial insertion by means of careful linguistic analysis, see Avi Hurvitz, "On the Term נָעַל נָעַל in Ruth 4:7,"

editor's technical formula distinguishes between what was "formerly" the case and what is implicitly now the case.⁴⁴ His annotation recalls the almost identically formulated opposition in the Hittite Laws that "formerly they would pay 40 sheqels of silver but now one pays 20 sheqels."

This example from Ruth is the single explicit acknowledgement in the Bible of a legal modification. The law involved, which marks the completion of land sale or exchange, is an unwritten common law or custom, not a formal statute. Nowhere mentioned in the Pentateuch, it does not derive from the revelation of law at Sinai. As such, its origin, like that of the Hittite Laws, is secular rather than divine. In both of these secular cases, then, the text itself makes it clear that the laws have a history: both a past, what was "formerly" the case, and a present, what is now the case. The text itself testifies that the laws change in response to social development.

3. The Impact of the Idea of Divine Revelation

An entirely new set of literary and religious issues emerge with the Pentateuchal claim that its laws originate in divine revelation. Once a law is attributed to God, how can it be superseded—that is to say, annulled—without God's prestige or authority being impaired? How can a specific component of divine revelation become obsolete without thereby qualifying the validity of God's word? Can one imagine a human editor candidly emerging from the text, as in Ruth, now, however, to announce the obsolescence of a divine commandment?⁴⁵ There thus exists an inherent tension within the bib-

in *Shnaton I: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, ed. Jonas C. Greenfield and Moshe Weinfeld, Jerusalem: Israel Bible Company, Tel Aviv: M. Newnan 1975, 45–49 (Hebrew; English abstract, pp. xiii–xiv).

⁴⁴ The technical force of the formula in Hebrew, especially clear from the parallel in 1 Sam. 9:9, has been noted by E.F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth* (Anchor Bible 7), Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday 1975, 147–48.

⁴⁵ It is important here to distinguish between the biblical authors' attempt to maintain the adequacy of Pentateuchal legislation and their striking freedom in representing Yahweh as fallible. Indeed, so taken aback is Yahweh by the immorality

lical laws between renewal and conservatism: between the need to amend laws or create new ones in light of inevitable historical change and the desire to preserve the authority of laws claiming a divine origin.

As a result of this tension, it was necessary to develop a number of sophisticated literary strategies to present new law as not in fact involving the revision or annulment of older laws ascribed to God. The biblical authors developed what may best be described as a “rhetoric of concealment,” one that served to camouflage the actual literary history of the laws. The revision of old law and the creation of new law continued to occur, just as in the Hittite Laws or Ruth. But rather than candidly specify, “this law is no longer the case,” as the editor was free to do with secular law, the editor of divine laws found indirect ways to adapt old law to new circumstances without slighting the prestige or authority of laws that tradition ascribed to

of his creation that, in a remarkable soliloquy at the outset of the biblical flood story, he reveals his fallibility as he regrets the creation of human life (Gen. 6:6–7). In other cases as well, Yahweh concedes his fallibility, or at least the absence of omniscience, and is forced to change his plans as a result of human iniquity (1 Sam. 2:30; 15:11; note also, inconsistently, 1 Sam. 15:29!). Even divine oracles proclaimed by the prophets sometimes remained unfulfilled or were controverted by history, a problem that the editors of the prophetic books were forced to address (see Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 476–82, 521–24). In none of these cases, however, is there any question about the infallibility of the divine laws or ethical proclamations, which are the focus here. In a sense, Yahweh’s fallibility, as the flood story reveals, is that he has created a fallible humanity. For just this reason, prophetic visions of a post-exilic “new age” often include notions of the inauguration of a new moral and religious regime. Such visions often include formulae that distinguish current practice from future transformation: for example, “In those [future] days, no longer shall they say... but rather...” (Jer. 3:16; 23:7–8; 31:29–30; cf. 16:14–15; Ezek. 18:2); see Moshe Weinfeld, “Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 88 (1976) 17–55. The new regime nonetheless presupposes the continuing validity of divine law. The change lies in the divine reprogramming of human nature, as if to enable — or coerce — fallible humans to heed God’s infallible law: “I will set my Torah within them; upon their heart will I write it” (Jer. 31:33a; similarly, Ezek. 36:27).

God. In what follows, I demonstrate a range of literary strategies that biblical authors employed to authorize — and to conceal — their reworking of authoritative laws. The Decalogue, which symbolizes the Israelite concept of revelation, provides a ready point of departure for examining these strategies.⁴⁶ The second of its commandments prohibits idolatry, because of God's professed zeal for an intimate, that is an exclusive, relationship with his nation. In its present redactional context, that commandment begins by prohibiting the manufacture of "an idol" (Exod. 20:4). It continues, prohibiting *their* worship

⁴⁶ See Moshe Weinfeld, "The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel's Tradition," in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. E.W. Firmage, B.G. Weiss, and J.W. Welch, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 1990, 3–47. That approach, which regards the Decalogue as ancient and Mosaic in origin, should be supplemented by the model of a late, deuteronomistic redaction of the Sinai pericope; see, for example, Christoph Dohmen, "Der Sinaibund als Neuer Bund nach Ex 19–34," in *Der Neue Bund im Alten: Studien zur Bundestheologie der beiden Testamente* (Quaestiones disputatae 146), ed. Erich Zenger, Freiburg: Herder 1993, 51–83; Erich Zenger, "Wie und wozu die Tora zum Sinai kam: Literarische und theologische Beobachtungen zu Exodus 19–34," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 126), ed. Marc Vervenne, Leuven: University Press/Peeters Press 1996, 265–88. In this context, it is impossible properly to address the dating of the Decalogue. Nor can the Pentateuchal texts that refer to vicarious punishment be fully considered here. The formula is almost certainly not original to the Decalogue. It very likely circulated independently; the range and extent of its inner-biblical reuse suggest its antiquity and prevalence. Further evidence for this hypothesis is provided by the formula's attestation in non-biblical inscriptions. Inscription B from the tomb cave at Khirbet Beit Lei (sixth century B.C.E.) reuses the attributes of mercy in the context of a petition to be spared from punishment; see Frank Moore Cross, Jr., "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. James A. Sanders, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday 1970, 299–306. Confirming the decipherment as dependent upon the divine attribute formula and arguing for a deliberate reformulation of it is Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Psalms and Inscriptions," in *Congress Volume, Vienna, 1980* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 32), ed. J.A. Emerton, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1981, 328–31.

(Exod. 20:5).⁴⁷ It then offers the following rationale for the prohibition:

For I, Yahweh your God, am an impassioned God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exod. 20:5–6)

The Hebrew participles translated “those who love” and “those who reject” are not affective but legal terms. Reflecting the terminology of Hittite and Aramaic state treaties, “love” designates political loyalty to the suzerain while “reject” denotes acts of treason.⁴⁸ Israelite authors took over this secular treaty terminology, together with the concept of a binding legal tie, in order to conceptualize the nation’s relationship with its God as a covenant. Now, despite the narrative’s ancient setting at the beginning of the nation’s history, the key theological idea of the covenant actually represents a late development which was then read back into Israel’s origins.⁴⁹ The importance of the Near Eastern treaty

⁴⁷ With its plural object, this prohibition against worship — “You shall not bow down to *them* or worship *them*” (Exod. 20:5) — cannot originally have continued the present second commandment, which prohibits the manufacture of “*an* idol,” in the singular (Exod. 20:4). More logically, it represents the continuation of the first commandment, which prohibits the worship of other deities, in the plural — “You shall have no other *gods* before me” (Exod. 20:3). At a later stage in the history of Israelite religion, as monotheism replaced monolatry, such references to actual deities were reinterpreted as designating instead the worship of inert idols. That newer perspective accounts for the interpolation here. The addition to the text prohibits the manufacture of images (v. 4), and thus separates the plural object (v. 5) from its original antecedent (v. 3). First identifying this redactional issue, see Walther Zimmerli, “Das zweite Gebot” [1950] in *id.*, *Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (Theologische Bücherei 19), Munich: Chr. Kaiser 1969, 234–48 (at 236–38).

⁴⁸ William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963) 77–87; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 81–91.

⁴⁹ See Lothar Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 36), Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1969. For an attempt, in part, to rehabilitate and rethink the covenant in light of the theological issues raised by Perlitt’s dating, see Ernest W. Nicholson, *God*

model for covenantal theology has long been recognized.⁵⁰ These ancient Near Eastern treaties were understood as being made in perpetuity. They were therefore binding not only upon those immediately signatory to them but also upon succeeding generations. Consequently, the punishment for non-compliance stipulated the execution both of those actually party to the treaty and of their progeny. That principle of distributive justice underlies Yahweh's threat that he will visit his rage upon the third and fourth generation of those guilty of breaking the covenant.⁵¹ The extension of retribution across three generations strikingly resembles a similar formulation found in a group of treaties made between the Neo-Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon and his eastern vassals in 672 B.C.E. In order to ensure their allegiance to Assurbanipal, his heir designate, Esarhaddon required that they take an oath stipulating both loyalty and accountability across three generations: "As long as we, *our sons* [and] *our grandsons* live, Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, shall be our king and our lord. If we place any other king or prince over *us, our sons, or our grandsons*, may all the gods mentioned by name [in this treaty] hold *us, our seed, and our seed's seed* to account."⁵²

and His People: *Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986.

⁵⁰ For a useful overview, see D.R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 1969.

⁵¹ Note the thorough study by Meir Weiss, "Some Problems in the Biblical Doctrine of Retribution," *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–62) 236–63; 32 (1962–63) 1–18 (Hebrew); reprinted in *Likkutei Tarbiz: A Biblical Studies Reader*, ed. Moshe Weinfeld, Jerusalem: Magnes 1979, 71–98, 99–116 (Hebrew). His argument, however, that "third and fourth" simply means "a large number of generations," and is thus equivalent to "the thousandth generation," is harmonistic. Moreover, it does not take into account the following parallels to the Neo-Assyrian treaties.

⁵² The translation of the Akkadian is my own. It draws on the excellent edition by Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, eds., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (State Archives of Assyria 2), Helsinki: Helsinki University Press 1988, 50 (§57, lines 507–12); and on Erica Reiner, tr., "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J.B. Pritchard, 3rd

By transferring this Near Eastern convention from the political to the theological domain, the biblical text formulates a doctrine of the transgenerational consequences of sin: although it is my parent who wrongs God, I and my children and my grandchildren are punished for the parent's wrongdoing, independent of any particular malfeasance on our part. The text is remarkably silent about whether the actual sinner is punished for his or her own offense or whether the expected punishment might be completely displaced onto the progeny.⁵³ Precisely this anomaly of justice occurs when God remits the capital punishment due David in double measure — for adultery with Bathsheba and for contriving the murder of Uriah, her Hittite husband — and transfers it instead to their innocent newborn son, who is stricken with a fatal illness (2 Sam. 12:1–15; similarly, 1 Kgs. 21:29).

Here there emerges a fundamental ethical and theological problem: Is it not odious for God to punish innocent persons, merely for being the progeny of sinners? Abraham took God to task for just this breach of justice while bargaining over the lives of the inhabitants of Sodom: "Shall you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? . . . Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Gen. 18:23, 25). Israelite authors keenly felt this problem of theodicy raised by the Decalogue's doctrine of transgenerational punishment. It was no merely abstract or modern theological problem but had vital implications for the nation's history. Ancient Israel endured a catastrophe in 587 B.C.E. when, following a two year siege, the Babylonian army breached the walls of Jerusalem, burned the city, gutted the Temple, and deported the majority of the population to Babylon. The editor of the book of Kings, charged with narrating that history, explains the destruction as the result of divine punishment for the unprecedented iniquities committed

ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 539. Note the similar generational reference at §25, lines 283–91.

⁵³ This delay in exacting punishment was clearly intended as an expression of divine mercy towards the penitent wrongdoer; see Yochanan Muffs, *Love & Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel*, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America 1992, 19 (on Exod. 32:34).

not by the generation contemporary with the destruction but rather by King Manasseh (696–641 B.C.E.), who ruled three generations beforehand (2 Kgs. 21:1–15; 23:26–27; 24:3–4; contrast 24:19–20).⁵⁴ The biblical editor had little choice: how else to explain the gutting and burning of Jerusalem that followed so shortly after the reign of righteous King Josiah, who had been heralded for his perfect devotion to the law of Moses (2 Kgs. 23:25)?

4. Critical Scrutiny of the Principle in Lamentations

The technique of accounting for the Babylonian Exile as punishment transferred transgenerationally may well have become commonplace, since it shows up in a number of different texts from the period following the exile. These texts confirm, however, that this historiographic “solution” created as many theological difficulties as it sought to solve. Lamentations, for example, preserves a moving poetic dirge over the destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering of its population. Near the book’s close, the speaker seems to share the orientation of the historiographer of Kings as he, too, accounts for the destruction as divine punishment for the apostasy of previous generations. That rationalization is now, however, subjected to critical scrutiny.

Our fathers sinned and are no more;

But as for us — the punishment for their iniquities we must bear! (Lam. 5:7)

The terminology of the lament, which pointedly refers both “fathers” (אבות) and to “punishment for iniquities” (עונות), alludes to the Decalogue’s doctrine of the transgenerational consequences of sin, in which God describes himself as “visiting the *punishment for the in-*

⁵⁴ There were three generations from Manasseh’s reign to the time that the Babylonians ended Egyptian control over Judah and made King Jehoiakim their vassal (2 Kgs. 24:1–5): Amon, Josiah, and Josiah’s two sons, Jehoahaz and Eliakim/Jehoiakim. The first deportation occurred in the next (fourth) generation with the deportation of King Jehoiachin (2 Kgs. 24:8–17).

iquity of the fathers upon the sons,” פָּקֹד עוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל בָּנִים (Exod. 20:5).⁵⁵ The speaker has broken apart the original genitive phrase of the Decalogue, making each of its two key terms into the subject of independent statements. As a result, God’s threat of punishment is here invoked as accomplished fact—but now from the perspective of the progeny who proclaim their innocence by restricting culpability to the previous generation. By insinuating the innocence of his own generation, the speaker asserts the injustice of divine justice. Moreover, in the Hebrew of the lament, the words for “fathers” (אֲבוֹת) and for “the punishment for iniquities” (עוֹנוֹת) are strongly linked by both assonance and rhyme. But the pronominal suffixes that specify “our fathers” (אֲבוֹתֵינוּ) and “the punishment for their iniquities” (עוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם) break the similarity of sound. The broken assonance highlights the fractured logic: the punishment that the speakers endure is not for their own, but for their *fathers’* apostasy. The indirect intertextual reference in fact amounts to the censure of a text whose infrangible authority is precisely the problem.

The injustice of the doctrine raises important practical difficulties as well. It inevitably creates an overwhelming sense of the futility of historical action altogether, inasmuch as the progeny cannot free themselves from the consequences of the past. In the grim circumstances of Israel after the catastrophe of destruction and exile, the future would have seemed radically foreclosed: the direct result not of one’s own but of a previous generation’s action. Yahweh himself anticipates the despair of the first group of deportees (those who had been deported with Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E.), citing their complaint in advance: “How

⁵⁵ Providing criteria to distinguish textual dependence from simple sharing of common language, and thus distinguishing between allusion (as intentional reuse) and “intertextuality” (which technically considers the questions of intention and of dependence irrelevant), see Benjamin D. Sommer, “Exegesis, Allusion and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (1996) 479–89; and *id.*, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1998, 6–72.

then shall we survive?" (Ezek. 33:10) Any step forward — whether towards personal renewal or national reconstruction — would appear pointless. For both theological and existential-historical reasons, therefore, we can expect biblical authors to struggle relentlessly against the injustice of the Decalogue's doctrine.⁵⁶

5. The Transformation of Divine Justice in Ezekiel

Precisely as Judah faced the prospect of national destruction, the prophet Ezekiel (active 593–573 B.C.E.) provided a profound meditation on the impact of temporality upon human action. Ezekiel had been among the upper echelon of Judean society deported to Babylon in 597 (thus prior to the destruction of Jerusalem with its Temple, and the exile of the city's population in 587). He here reported to his fellow deportees, who lived in a period of uncertainty, still hoping for their restoration to Jerusalem, about an oracle he had recently received:

The word of Yahweh came to me: "How dare you bandy about this proverb upon the soil of Israel, 'Fathers eat sour grapes and their children's teeth are set on edge?' As I live — declares the Lord Yahweh — this proverb shall no longer be current among you in Israel. Consider: all lives are mine. The life of the father and the life of the child are both mine. The person who sins, only he shall die!" (Ezek. 18:1–4)⁵⁷

The proverb cited by the prophet graphically portrays transgenerational punishment. As the prophet's refutation implies, the proverb is not concerned with literal sour grapes but with moral ones, with sin and its consequences. The prophet rejects this proverb and substitutes for it a clear statement of individual responsibility: henceforth the father shall suffer for his own misdeeds; the child will be spared

⁵⁶ See Michael Fishbane, "Torah and Tradition," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1977, 275–82; and *id.*, *Biblical Interpretation*, 335–50. The following analysis is indebted to Fishbane's work.

⁵⁷ This translation is indebted to *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 1988; and Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20* (Anchor Bible 22), Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday 1983, 325.

inherited punishment. Strikingly, while rejecting the proverb as offensive, the prophet never disputes that the moral economy it depicts has hitherto been valid! The oracle has a parallel text in Jeremiah that also rejects the proverb: “In those [future] days, no longer shall they say, ‘Fathers eat unripe grapes and the teeth of the sons are set on edge,’ but rather, ‘Each shall die for his own iniquity; whoever eats unripe grapes, [only that person’s] teeth shall be set on edge’” (Jer. 31:29–30). In Jeremiah’s version of the oracle, the principle of individual responsibility will take effect only with the advent of a new moral and religious economy, sometime in an unspecified future (Jer. 31:27, 31, 33). Jeremiah thus concedes that the proverb continues to be valid for the present and immediate future. Only in the case of Ezekiel is the new principle immediately to replace the rejected one.

The correspondence between the rejected proverb and the doctrine of transgenerational punishment can hardly be accidental. The repudiated proverb and the Decalogue doctrine share not only the notion of retribution vicariously transmitted from one generation to the next, but also common terminology: the resonant language of “fathers” (אבות) and “children” (בנים, literally, “sons”). At the same time, the overlap is only partial: sufficient for the proverb to resonate with the Decalogue doctrine, but insufficiently specific or extensive to point to an explicit citation or reuse of that text. Might Ezekiel’s indirection be intentional? The proverb almost certainly functions as a straw man. The problem confronted by Ezekiel consists not simply in the popular sensibility of his time trenchantly depicted in the proverb: the perception among the exiles that they suffer innocently and that divine justice is arbitrary (see Ezek. 18:25, 29; 33:17). More seriously, this popular perception of divine injustice has sanction in ancient Israel’s formative canon! The explicit rejection of transgenerational punishment would require Ezekiel to repudiate an authoritative teaching attributed to Yahweh.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, failing to repudiate it validates the depor-

⁵⁸ Joel S. Kaminsky regards the principle of individual responsibility advanced by Ezekiel 18 in *ad hoc* terms, as a situation-specific response, rather than as a

tees' perception that Yahweh is unjust and that their future is fore-closed.

Ezekiel therefore uses the proverb as a strategic foil for the far more theologically problematic act of effectively annulling a divine law. The prophet in effect "de-voices" the doctrine's original attribution to God and then "re-voices" it as folk wisdom. By this means the oracle obscures its subversion of the divine instruction found in the Decalogue. While it is a simple matter to repudiate a folk saying, it cannot but raise serious theological problems to reject the Decalogue's concept of transgenerational punishment as morally repugnant. The formulation of the new conception of divine justice echoes the existing rule requiring individual liability in matters of civil and criminal law. In the latter sphere, biblical law prohibits vicarious punishment and specifies that only the perpetrator should be held accountable:

concerted rejection of transgenerational punishment altogether, let alone as a rejection of a particular text or specific tradition (*Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* [Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements 196], Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1995, 189). While Kaminsky concedes the influence of the formula for secular justice (Deut. 24:24), he denies it in the case of the formula for divine justice. His approach seeks to redress the tendency of past scholarship to impose an external agenda on the chapter by regarding it as pivotal in the development of a theology of individual salvation within ancient Israel (see n. 61 below). The hesitation to assign the weight of formal doctrinal change to the chapter is therefore understandable. Yet going to the opposite extreme of denying both the diachronic development of theological ideas and the possibility of the prophet's critically challenging an existing doctrine of divine justice raises an equal concern. Eliminating both possibilities denies the prophet his agency and creativity. Further, the technique used to isolate each text from the other so as to deny textual allusion or doctrinal contradiction corresponds precisely to the method of classical harmonistic legal exegesis. That approach qualifies the otherwise nuanced theological reading.

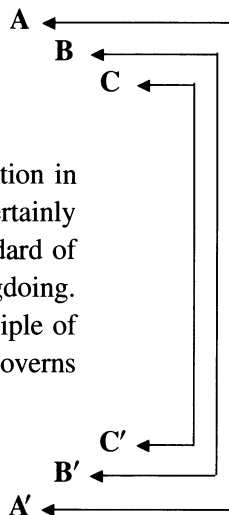
Fathers shall not be put to death on account of sons,
nor sons be put to death on account of fathers;
each shall (only) be put to death for his own offence.

(Deut. 24:16)

This judicial expectation of individual retribution in the sphere of civil and criminal law almost certainly provided a means for Ezekiel to revise the standard of punishment in the sphere of theological wrongdoing. Ezekiel's formulation chiastically cites the principle of secular justice, reapplying it so that it also governs offences against the deity:⁵⁹

The person who sins, (only) he shall die:
a son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,
nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.

(Ezek. 18:20)



The formula for individual liability in civil and criminal law thus almost certainly served as a legal and literary precedent for the prophet.⁶⁰ It enabled him to bring theological justice into conformity with secular justice by means of analogical legal reasoning.

⁵⁹ This analysis follows Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 333; and Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 337–41. On inverted citation as marking reuse (as noted by Greenberg), see the analysis of Deut. 7:9–10 below. The likelihood of the reuse of Deut. 24:16 is increased with the recognition that Ezekiel 18 contains a complex series of reworkings of prior legal texts (Ezek. 18:7–8, 13, 16, 18 reuse Deut. 23:20–21; 24:6, 10–15, 17; so Fishbane, *loc. cit.*).

⁶⁰ The scholarly consensus, which I follow, regards Ezekiel 18 as later than Deuteronomy 24, and therefore allows for such literary dependence. A recent challenge to that consensus, however, regards Deuteronomy 19–25 as a very late addition to the legal corpus that, in effect, is “post-Deuteronomic,” and that draws upon both Ezekiel and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26). That perspective reverses the direction of dependence in this case, maintaining that Deut. 24:16 depends upon Ezekiel 18. For this argument, see Georg Braulik, “Ezechiel und Deuteronomium: Die ‘Sippenhaftung’ in Ezechiel 18,20 und Deuteronomium 24,16 unter Berücksichtigung von Jeremia 31,29–30 und 2 Kön 14,6,” in *id.*, *Studien zum Deuteronomium und seiner Nachgeschichte* (Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 33), Stuttgart: Katholi-

In the rest of the chapter Ezekiel exploits the proverb in an intricately crafted series of acute reflections upon morality in order to deprive the proverb of any moral validity whatsoever: neither righteousness nor sin, neither reward nor punishment may be communicated between generations (18:10–20).⁶¹ The prophet finally rejects the generational logic of the proverb altogether and transforms it into a metaphor for the freedom of an individual to transform and renew his life, at every moment in his life, whatever the burden of his past (18:21–29).⁶² Even if one has committed unremitting evil, Ezekiel contends,

sches Bibelwerk 2001, 171–201. Braulik himself cites challenges to his redactional analysis (*loc. cit.*, 200 n. 122).

⁶¹ The doctrine of repentance cannot be viewed as operating only in the context of the individual: its application is simultaneously individual and national. See the thoughtful study by Baruch J. Schwartz, “Repentance and Determinism in Ezekiel,” *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies: The Bible and Its World*, Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies 1994, 123–30. Other scholars properly stress the national reference but regard it as inconsistent with a focus also on the individual; see Paul M. Joyce, “Individual Responsibility in Ezekiel 18?,” in *Studia biblica 1978: Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies, Oxford, 3–7 April 1978*, ed. E.A. Livingstone, Sheffield: University of Sheffield 1979, 185–96; and Gordon H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse in the Book of Ezekiel* (Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 126), Atlanta: Scholars Press 1990, 113–58. Paul M. Joyce astutely rejects the widespread assumption of an evolution within ancient Israel from belief in corporate responsibility to individual responsibility, with Ezekiel 18 providing the transition between the two; see *id.*, “Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility,” in *Ezekiel and His Book* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 74), ed. J. Lust, Leuven: Peeters Press 1986, 317–32.

⁶² Ezekiel’s formulation of freedom is essentially modern in its conceptual structure, despite its religious terminology. Structurally similar is the conceptualization of moral freedom as independence from the burden of the past by Immanuel Kant. He establishes a dialectical notion of freedom: although there is no freedom from causality (from an immediately preceding cause) within nature, such freedom exists from the vantage point of ethics and religion. He intricately probes the issues involved in holding someone morally accountable who is a habitual liar. “Reason is present in all the actions of men at all times and under all circumstances, and is always the same; but it is not itself in time, and does not fall into any new state in which it was not before. . . . When we say that in spite of his whole previous course of life the agent

should one repent, one will not suffer the consequences of that evil (18:21–23, 27–29). The individual is held exclusively accountable for the moral decisions he makes in the present. Ezekiel's theology of freedom works to counter notions among his contemporaries of the futility of action. The prophet argues that the future is not hermetically closed but hermeneutically open. Ezekiel began with inexorable fate but ends with freedom, moral action, and repentance as the sole forces that govern human action.

6. The Homily on Divine Justice in Deuteronomy

An even more remarkable transformation of the Decalogue doctrine can be found within the legal corpus of the Pentateuch itself. Deuteronomy presents itself as a Mosaic address to the nation of Israel, forty years after Sinai, on the eve of the nation's entry into the promised land (Deut. 1:1–3). According to the editorial superscription, Moses here explicates the laws that God had earlier proclaimed (Deut. 1:5) and exhorts the nation to obedience. In this new literary setting, Moses, while reviewing the past, ostensibly quotes the Decalogue (Deuteronomy 5) and then preaches to the nation concerning it. Moses thus expounds upon divine justice:

Know, therefore, that only Yahweh your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps his gracious covenant to the thousandth generation of those who love him and keep his commandments, but who requites those who reject him—to their face, by destroying them. He does not delay with anyone who rejects him—to his face he requites him. (Deut. 7:9–10)

The vocabulary of this passage makes it clear that the speaker alludes specifically to the Decalogue, which he has previously quoted (chapter 5). This reuse of the Decalogue is marked by the ancient

could have refrained from lying, this only means that the act is under the immediate power of reason, and that reason in its causality is not subject to any conditions of appearance or of time." See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith, unabridged edition, New York: St. Martin's, Toronto: Macmillan 1965, 478 (A556/B584).

scribal technique of inverted citation (technically, “Seidel’s Law”).⁶³ Often in the Bible and post-biblical literature, an author will quote a source in inverted order, such that a text sequence AB would recur elsewhere as B’A’. Thus, in the present case, the first person sequence of the Decalogue — (A) “those who reject me” (לִשְׂנְאִי) and (B) “those who love me and keep my commandments” (לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי; Deut. 5:9–10) — is inverted. In the new context, it is recast as a third person report: (B’) “those who love him and keep his commandments” (לְאַהֲבָיו וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו) and (A’) “those who reject him” (לִשְׂנְאָיו). The Mosaic speaker purports to provide a homiletic paraphrase of the formula for divine justice in the Decalogue.⁶⁴ In

⁶³ The principle of inverted citation (see also n. 59 above) is named after its discoverer: M. Seidel, “Parallels between Isaiah and Psalms,” *Sinai* 38 (1955–56) 149–72, 229–40, 272–80, 335–55 (150); reprinted, *id.*, *Hiqrei Miqra*, Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1978, 1–97 (Hebrew). Seidel’s claims are often insufficiently controlled by criteria for establishing the direction of dependence. More controlled uses include Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Textual Study of the Bible — A New Outlook,” in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. F.M. Cross and S. Talmon, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1975, 362–63; P. Beentjes, “Inverted Quotations in the Bible: A Neglected Stylistic Pattern,” *Biblica* 63 (1982) 506–23; Marc Z. Brettler, “Jud 1,1–2,10: From Appendix to Prologue,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101 (1989) 434; and Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 35 and 219 nn. 11–12. On this and related editorial markers, see Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 17–20.

⁶⁴ The proposal that “those who reject him/anyone who rejects him” (Deut. 7:10) tags לִשְׂנְאִי, “those who reject me” (Exod. 20:5 = Deut. 5:9), raises a series of issues that go beyond the scope of this essay to address properly. If my analysis is correct, it provides indirect evidence for the originality of לִשְׂנְאִי within the divine attribute formula. That indirect attestation is important because the formula for transgenerational punishment of sin is also found elsewhere in the Pentateuch where, however, the specification “those who reject me” is absent (Exod. 34:6–7; Num. 14:18). Moreover, a strong case has been made on form-critical grounds that the formulation lacking the specification (especially the version in Exod. 34:6–7) historically precedes the Decalogue version, which includes it; see J. Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex. 34,6 f und seiner Parallelen,” *Biblica* 38 (1957) 130–50 (at 145–47). The hypothesis that Exodus 34 is ancient then presses the question, how did the reference to “those who reject me” come to be introduced into the Decalogue? Weinfeld suggests that the term was introduced into Deut. 5:9 by

the editor of Deuteronomy, specifically to bring the Decalogue into conformity with the notion of individual retribution found in Deut. 7:10 (*Deuteronomy*, 318). As such, God would *only* punish transgenerationally “those who reject me” — meaning those who continue to sin. Subsequently, Weinfeld suggests, the Exodus Decalogue was “corrected” and made consistent with the Deuteronomy version. By this reading, the formulation of the doctrine of divine justice in the Decalogue would not represent, as it stands, simply the point of departure for a series of later theological corrections and reworkings. Instead, as Fishbane suggests, it would itself already represent a response to those later reworkings, with the “correction” read back into the source-text, so as to restrict punishment to “those who reject me”: that is, those who are individually guilty (*Biblical Interpretation*, 345 n. 72). Although the position taken by Weinfeld and Fishbane is well argued, that approach provides no explanation for the introduction of “those who reject him” into Deut. 7:10.

These difficulties derive in part from the long tradition in scholarship that regards the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 34 (in which Yahweh proclaims his divine attributes) as an ancient text. That version of the formula — “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Exod. 34:7) — lacks the Decalogue’s reference to “those who reject me.” For both reasons, it has often been regarded as preserving the oldest form of the doctrine of divine justice. That analysis is unlikely, however. Recent scholarship has increasingly challenged the antiquity of Exodus 34, regarding it rather as a late text that reflects theological and sociological issues of the post-exilic period. On that basis, the entire question of the literary development of the various formulations of divine justice should be reopened. For the change in viewpoint on Exodus 34, see H. Louis Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism*, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary 1982, 62–66; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 194–97; William Johnstone, “Re-activating the Chronicles Analogy in Pentateuchal Studies, with Special Reference to the Sinai Pericope in Exodus,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99 (1987) 16–37; Erik Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels: Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament* (Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament series 27), Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1988, 116–26; Erhard Blum, “Das sog. «Privilegrecht» in Exodus 34,11–26: Ein Fixpunkt der Komposition des Exodusbuches?” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 126), ed. Marc Vervenne, Leuven: University Press/Peeters Press 1996, 347–66; Shimon Bar-On, “The Festival Calendars in Exodus XXIII 14–19 and XXXIV 18–26,” *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998) 161–95; Eckart Otto, “Die Nachpriesterschriftliche Pentateuchredaktion im Buch Exodus,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus*, ed. Vervenne, 62–111; David M. Carr, “Method in Determination of Direction of Dependence: An Empirical Test of Criteria Applied to Exodus 34,11–26

fact, the homily so fundamentally transforms the original as to revoke it. The speaker strategically deletes references to the transgenerational consequences of sin and instead asserts the immediate punishment of the sinner. By implication divine punishment for sin is restricted to the sinner alone. In contrast to the Decalogue, the progeny, here strikingly unmentioned, are not explicitly visited with divine punishment.

The doctrine of individual retribution is not presented as a departure from the *status quo*, as in the case of Ezekiel. Instead, the new teaching is presented as consistent with the very doctrine that it rejects: as an authoritatively taught “re-citation” of the original *theologoumenon*. The following diagram shows how Ezekiel marshals the lemmas of the formula for transgenerational punishment against itself. Its key terms are adroitly redeployed so as to abrogate transgenerational punishment and mandate individual retribution:

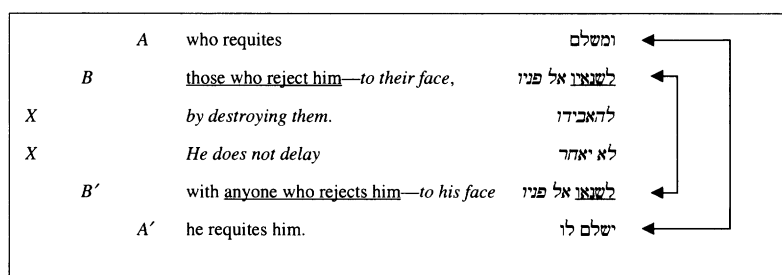


Figure 1. Lemmatic Reworking in Support of Doctrinal Innovation (Deut. 7:10)

The chiasmic pattern of the repetition frames and thus highlights Deuteronomy’s ethical innovation (marked by X): the introduction of the notion that God “does not delay” (לא יאחר) retributive justice, that

and its Parallels,” in *Gottes Volk am Sinai* (Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 18), ed. M. Köckert, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2001, 107–40; Bernard M. Levinson, “Goethe’s Analysis of Exodus 34 and Its Influence on Julius Wellhausen: The Pfröpfung of the Documentary Hypothesis,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 114 (2002) 212–23; and *id.*, “The Revelation of Redaction: Exod 34:10–26 as a Challenge to the Standard Documentary Hypothesis” (forthcoming).

is, that punishment no longer occurs transgenerationally. That doctrinal innovation is accomplished by means of textual reformulation. As the underlining in the diagram shows, a key term from the originally problematic text is cited: the form of retribution due “those who reject him,” alluding to “those who reject me” (Exod. 20:5 = Deut. 5:9). Once cited, however, the term receives a new continuation: the new teaching of individual responsibility (as the diagram’s italicized text shows). The double annotation stipulates that God requites the sinner, literally, “to his face” (אל פניו).⁶⁵ As the medieval commentator Rashi (1040–1105) accurately saw, the phrase means “in his lifetime” (בחייו).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Contrary to several modern translations, the phrase cannot mean “immediately” or “instantly.” There is no evidence in the Bible for instantaneous divine retribution for wrongdoing. Thus missing the point are the translations offered by Moffat’s American version (“immediately”) and by the new Jewish Publication Society Version (“instantly”); see *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1988, 286. The *Tanakh* translation must derive from Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Mikra ki-Peschuto*, 3 vols., Berlin: M. Poppelauer 1899–1901, 1:323.

⁶⁶ Rashi frequently embeds classical rabbinic exegesis, particularly *midrash halakha*, in his commentary on the Pentateuch. In this case, his annotation directly reflects the Aramaic Targum Onkelos. The latter does not strictly translate the lemma of Deut. 7:10 but rather amplifies it midrashically, to argue that God “requites the good deeds of those who reject him in their lifetime (בחייו), so as to cause them to perish.” Ironically, the correct insight into the literal meaning of the specific phrase in the lemma—the recognition that “to his face” means “in his life”—actually comes in the service of a midrashic transformation of the verse. The verse is reinterpreted to forestall the inevitable question of theodicy raised by the verse in its literal meaning: How is it that, if God truly rewards the righteous and punishes the guilty, does the experience of life suggest the contrary: that the wicked seem to prosper in the world, while the righteous suffer? The midrashic solution to the problem is to extend the analysis into the afterlife. The wicked receive reward for their good deeds only in this life while they are requited for their iniquity by being denied a share in the world to come. The righteous, conversely, suffer only in this life for any iniquities they may have committed while being rewarded for their good deeds with the assurance of a place in the world to come. That extension of the time span of the verse into a putative afterlife, however, completely contradicts the radical claim for divine justice within history made by Deut. 7:10. These issues are overlooked in the untenable claim concerning the Targum: “The Aramaic paraphrase is a reasonable interpretation of the verse’s *peshat* [literal sense]”; so, Israel Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Deuteron-*

The annotations redefine divine punishment and restrict it so that it no longer extends across generations. Instead, it applies only to the guilty, “in their own person” (so, correctly, NRSV).⁶⁷ The paraphrase of the source thus abrogates the source, which now propounds the doctrine of individual responsibility.

In formal terms, the new dispensation represents a studied series of annotations to the original doctrine, cited almost as a scriptural lemma that requires a gloss. In substantive terms, however, far from simply elucidating the lemma, the author of the gloss subverts it. Moreover, there is no formal demarcation between the lemma and

omy: *An English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary (Based on A. Sperber's Edition)*, Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav 1982, 115. In its rendering of Deut. 7:10, Onqelos corresponds closely to the Palestinian Targumic tradition, which has a well-known proclivity for extensive “aggadic” expansions. See the rendering of Deut 7:10 in Michael L. Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to their Extant Sources* (Analecta Biblica 76), 2 vols., Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1980, 1:213, 2:171. For the social and theological context of these additions, see Avigdor Shinan, *The Aggadah in the Aramaic Targums to the Pentateuch*, 2 vols., Jerusalem: Makor 1979, 2:301 (Hebrew). The best edition of Rashi's Commentary on the Pentateuch, citing his classical sources (here noting the correspondence with Targum Onqelos) is Charles Ber Chavel, ed., *Perushe Rashi 'al ha-Torah*, 3rd ed., Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1985–86, 532 (Hebrew). The latter, of course, does not address the exegetical issues discussed here. Finally, despite its midrashic turn, Rashi is correct to follow Targum Onqelos in understanding “to his face” (אל פניו) as meaning “in his lifetime” (בחייו). An equivalent idiom occurs elsewhere: “Haran died *during the lifetime of* (על פני) Terah, his father” (Gen. 11:28a, literally, “upon the face of”; cf. Num. 3:4).

⁶⁷ A member of the Spanish school of medieval rabbinic exegesis, Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164 C.E.), rejected Rashi's midrashic approach. Ibn Ezra recognized that the issue in Deut. 7:10 is not an opposition between this world and the afterlife but between individual responsibility and vicarious punishment. He correctly, if quietly, saw that the verse contradicts the Decalogue doctrine by restricting judgment to the agent “himself” (לעצמו). See Abraham ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. A. Weiser, 3 vols., Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute 1977, 3:238 (Hebrew). Ironically, ibn Ezra's rendering is almost identical to that of the modern New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Making allowance for the NRSV's commitment to gender-neutral language, its correct translation (“in their own person”) precisely corresponds to that earlier proposed by ibn Ezra.

its annotation: in effect, the gloss on the lemma is not distinguished from the lemma itself. The revisionist voice of the glossator directly continues, and is equal in authority with, the divine voice of the source. The revision of tradition asserts the originality of tradition. Such learned reworking of authoritative texts to make them sanction the needs of later generations, or to sanction a later interpretation of religious law as having “scriptural” warrant, is more conventionally associated with a much later stage in the history of Judaism (ca. 200 B.C.E. through 150 C.E.). It is evident in the reuse of the Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the book of Jubilees, and in the exegetical midrashim of the rabbinic period, for example.⁶⁸ Classical antiquity also attests a genre of scholastic commentary, formally structured as lemma and gloss.⁶⁹ Deuteronomy’s transformation of the doctrine for transgenerational punishment into one that propounds individual responsibility confirms the sophisticated use of such techniques in ancient Israel.

The authors of Deuteronomy employ two techniques to present their reformulation covertly. The first is lemmatic citation and reformulation, as what purports to be mere paraphrase in fact constitutes a radical subversion of the textual authority of the Decalogue. The new doctrine of individual retribution cites the very doctrine that it replaces, yet does so “atomistically,” selectively redeploying individual words as markers of tradition while breaking down their original semantic reference.⁷⁰ Reduced to a cluster of individual lemmas and then reassem-

⁶⁸ The literature of course is vast. Demonstrating continuities of exegetical technique between biblical and post-biblical reworking of texts is Michael Fishbane, “Use, Authority, and Interpretation of Mikra at Qumran,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2:3), ed. Martin J. Mulder, Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress 1988, 339–77.

⁶⁹ See H. Gregory Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the Ancient World: Philosophers, Jews and Christians*, London and New York: Routledge 2000, 75–82.

⁷⁰ *Contra* Joachim Schaper, who reduces to a logical absurdity the premise that the tendentious “exegetical” reworking of a prestigious or authoritative text might either abrogate that text or curtail its authority (“Schriftauslegung und Schriftwerdung

bled in a new context, the older doctrine becomes infused with new content. Citation here seems to function less as an acknowledgement of the authority of a source than as a means to transform that source: to “re-inscribe” that source in a new context that, in effect, restricts and contracts its original authority.⁷¹ The second device is pseudepigraphy, the attribution of a text to a prestigious speaker from the past.⁷² The authors of Deuteronomy do not write directly in their own voice. Instead, they harness the voice of Moses in order, literally and metaphorically, to “authorize” their reformulation of the Decalogue. The risk of discontinuity with tradition is thus paradoxically avoided by attributing the revision of the Decalogue doctrine to the same Mosaic speaker credited with propounding it in the first place. Equally profound trans-

im alten Israel: Eine vergleichende Exegese von Ex 20.24–26 und Dtn 12.13–19,” *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 5 [1999] 111–32). The history of interpretation requires a more dialectical model of hermeneutics. In this example, whereby transgenerational punishment is replaced by individual retribution, the latter doctrine finally controls the way that the former one is understood and taught, as the targumic tradition confirms (see next section).

⁷¹ For the same phenomenon in the legal corpus of Deuteronomy, see Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 46–48.

⁷² See the stimulating analysis of Morton Smith, “Pseudepigraphy in the Israelite Literary Tradition,” in *Pseudepigrapha I: Pseudopythagorica — Lettres de Platon — Littérature pseudépigraohique juive* (Fondation Hardt: Entretiens sur l’antiquité classique 18), ed. Kurt von Fritz, Geneva: Vandoeuvres 1971, 191–215 (with ensuing panel discussion). Both techniques are attested within the Dead Sea Scrolls; see Moshe J. Bernstein, “Pseudepigraphy in the Qumran Scrolls: Categories and Functions,” in *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 31), ed. Esther G. Chazon and Michael Stone, Leiden: Brill 1999, 1–26. Concerned to redress the theological issues raised by false attribution, see David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 39), Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr-Siebeck 1986. Discussing pseudepigraphy’s importance for the authority claim of rabbinic literature, see Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001, 23–25.

formations of ancient Israel's formative canon take place elsewhere in Deuteronomy, especially in its legal corpus (chapters 12–26).⁷³

This radically revisionist Mosaic speaker of Deuteronomy, despite appearances, voices the concerns of Israelite authors who were close contemporaries with Ezekiel (593–573 B.C.E.).⁷⁴ Deuteronomy is set in the distant past, prior to Israel's entry into Canaan (thus, ca. 1200 B.C.E.). Nonetheless, the actual date of its composition (that is, of its literary core) is dated by most scholars to the late seventh century, since Deuteronomy's demand for cultic centralization is viewed as the trigger of Josiah's religious reform (622 B.C.E.; 2 Kings 22–23). Material was certainly added to Deuteronomy during the exile; the instruction concerning divine justice in Deuteronomy 7 likely derives from that later activity.⁷⁵ As Deuteronomy's authors confronted the successive threats of Neo-Assyrian and then Babylonian hegemony, they fashioned a radically new vision of religion and society to enable the nation to survive. In order to sanction that vision, they tied it to the very traditions that were actually displaced. Moses, as prophetic intermediary and textual speaker, here mediates the innovative voice of Deuteronomy's authors.

7. The Interpretation of Divine Justice in the Targum

With the close of the Scriptural canon, texts such as Ezekiel 18 and Deuteronomy 7, whose authors had each earlier struggled obliquely with the authority of the Decalogue, have now themselves won authoritative status coextensive with it. Indeed, in a striking reversal of literary

⁷³ For an analysis of these changes in the areas of sacrifice, the calendar, and the public administration, see Eckart Otto, "Von der Gerichtsordnung zum Verfassungsentwurf: Deuteronomische Gestaltung und deuteronomistische Interpretation im »Ämtergesetz« Dtn 16,18–18,22," in »Wer ist wie du, HERR, unter den Göttern?« *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels für Otto Kaiser*, ed. Ingo Kottsieper et al., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1995, 142–55; and Levinson, *Deuteronomy*.

⁷⁴ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 158–78, 244–319.

⁷⁵ A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (New Century Bible Commentary), London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott 1979, 181, 186.

history, these passages now eclipse the Decalogue's doctrine of transgenerational punishment since they mediate its reception and interpretation for later communities of readers. A text from this post-biblical period offers a final strategy for the reformulation of revelation. As Hebrew ceased being spoken by Jews under Persian and then Hellenistic rule, it was gradually replaced by either Aramaic or Greek as the lingua franca. Consequently, translations of the Bible into these new vernacular languages became necessary to serve the liturgical needs of the community.⁷⁶ The Aramaic translation that eventually became dominant in Babylonia during the talmudic period (ca. 200–640 C.E.) is called Targum Onqelos. In the main, it is simple and non-expansive, and commonly regarded as a literal translation of the Hebrew. In translating the Decalogue, however, Onqelos makes several telling additions to the formula for the transgenerational consequences of sin:

... visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the *rebellious* children, upon the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, *when the children continue to sin as their fathers*.⁷⁷

Like the “Moses” of Deuteronomy 7, the Aramaic Targum presents itself not as a revision or as a new teaching but as the original significance of the Hebrew source text. Nonetheless, by means of their additions, the post-biblical interpreters responsible for Onqelos have God restrict the punishment so that only the guilty, never the innocent, are punished. Only when sinful action is transgenerational — “when the children continue to sin as their fathers” — is the punishment fittingly transgenerational as well. As such, only “rebellious” children are punished, never the innocent progeny of sinful fathers.

⁷⁶ See Emanuel Tov, “The Septuagint,” and Philip S. Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Mikra*, 161–88, 217–54 (full citation in n. 68 above). On the Targums, see also John W. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture*, London: Cambridge University Press 1969.

⁷⁷ *Tg. Onq.* Exod. 20:5; see A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts: The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos*, 5 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1959–73, 1:122 (my translation).

This radical reformulation of the original doctrine amounts to a post-biblical theodicy: the Targum's authors expunge the slightest chance of God's espousing a doctrine of injustice. What the text means, the Targum affirms, is that divine justice requires a notion of individual responsibility. There exists no adequate doctrine of divine justice except as the voice of Yahweh in the Decalogue is heard through and understood to be consistent with Ezekiel's prophetic oracle. In harmonizing the two texts, the authors of the Targum present their exegetical accommodation of the Decalogue to Ezekiel 18 as the literal meaning and original significance of the Decalogue itself. The human voice of exegesis in the Targum thereby creates the divine voice of the Decalogue anew in its own image.

In solving one problem, however, the Targum's revision creates others. If God only punishes those who commit wrongdoing in each generation, then the doctrine of the transgenerational consequences of sin has been entirely vitiated. While the corrected version saves God from committing iniquity, it also makes the original text redundant. What is the logic for even mentioning the generations if it is only individual retribution that operates, no longer transgenerational punishment? The drive to erase the contradiction between transgenerational punishment (Exod. 20:5 = Deut. 5:9) and individual retribution (Ezekiel 18; Jer. 31:29–30; Deut. 7:10), while at the same time preserving the integrity of the Scriptural canon, means that the problematic doctrine is formally retained even as it is substantively repudiated by means of the strategic interpolation. The original doctrine has now been reduced to a lexical shell, devoid of its original content.

In effect the Targum has created a *tertium quid*: transgenerational punishment in the Decalogue is suddenly contingent upon whether each generation involved fails to make the repentance that would abrogate the retribution. With the new formulation, another paradox emerges. The attempt to eliminate the contradiction between the Decalogue and Ezekiel 18 has introduced a new version of the Decalogue consistent neither with the original Decalogue (in substance, since it now asserts individual retribution) nor with Ezekiel 18 (in form, since the prophetic teaching is now revoiced as divine, while Ezekiel's

doctrine of repentance passes unmentioned). Nonetheless, that revisionist transformation of the Decalogue as propounding the doctrine of individual retribution became the halakhic norm, both in talmudic and in medieval exegesis.⁷⁸ Ironically, the very drive to maintain the hermeneutical coherence of the canon has abrogated, both by addition and subtraction, the primary requirement of that canon *not* to innovate, whether by addition or subtraction.

III. Conclusions: The Canon as Sponsor of Innovation

Textual authority was widely challenged and actively debated in ancient Israel. Yet that debate took place in textual terms. The “ingenuity” that, for Smith, warrants the centrality of exegesis to the study of religion thus emerges as a form of creativity that has been insufficiently recognized by the discipline of academic Religious Studies. At issue is a technical facility with texts, the meditative skill of an editor or scribe as a creative manifestation of spirit. The ineluctable connection between religious renewal and textual reworking brings into clear focus the role of the technically trained scribe as the agent of cultural change. The skilled scribe is both thinker and religious visionary; spirit becomes manifest in the scribe’s revision of a text. From the perspective of ancient Israel, therefore, revelation is not prior to or external to the text; revelation is in the text and of the text.

The conceptual breakthrough is grounded in the text; the originality of thought is a consequence of engagement with the textual curriculum; and the break with tradition presents itself in terms of continuity with tradition. Ingenuity here takes the form of literary sophistication: the skill by means of which successive writers were able to conceal the conflict between their new doctrine of individual retribution and the authoritative principle of transgenerational punishment. That ingenuity required striking technical means — dodges both of authorial voice (including devoicing, revoicing, and pseudepigraphy) and of the

⁷⁸ See *b. Ber.* 7a; *b. Sanh.* 27b; *b. Šeb* 39; as noted by Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 345 n. 72.

scribal craft (including Seidel's law and lemmatic citation and reapplication). This extensive repertoire of sleights of scribal hand suggests the difficulty of innovation in ancient Israel.

Paradoxically, such sophistication also underscores the wide-ranging possibilities of innovation, as Israel's formative canon itself finally sponsors innovation. Nor does the process cease with the canon's closure, as the Targum's reading of individual responsibility into the Decalogue demonstrates. The reworking of tradition presents itself as the original significance of tradition; the challenge to the source is read back into the source; the author renders his own voice silent by attributing that voice to the authoritative source, and thereby emerges all the more powerfully as a true author, thinker, and reworker of tradition. The Torah is radically transformed by the interpretation of Torah.

Tradition itself emerges here as a hermeneutical construction, since the citation of tradition provides a means to rework tradition. Citation does not entail passive deference to the ostensibly authoritative — canonical — source but rather critical engagement with it.⁷⁹ That generalization held true while the traditions of ancient Israel were still taking shape, as when the third person Mosaic paraphrase of transgenerational punishment actually propounds individual retribution (Deuteronomy 7). It also holds true once the canon is closed. In a final turn of the screw, the Decalogue itself — according to the Targum — now propounds individual retribution. Through various genres and periods of rabbinic literature the citation either of a scriptural or of an earlier rabbinic source will mark the transformation or even domination of that source.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ See Bernard M. Levinson, "The Hermeneutics of Tradition in Deuteronomy," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000) 269–86 (at 283–86).

⁸⁰ On midrashic citation of scripture as involving transformation of scripture, see Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 35. On the Amoraic domination of the Mishnah in a *sugya* from the Palestinian Talmud, see Martin S. Jaffee, "The Pretext of Interpretation: Rabbinic Oral Torah and the Charisma of Revelation," in *God in Language*, ed. Robert P. Scharlemann and Gilbert E.M. Ogutu, New York: Paragon House 1987, 73–89.

Similar issues apply to the citation of the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament and at Qumran.⁸¹

Israel's concept of textual authority was thus profoundly dialectical: the break with tradition validates itself in the vocables of tradition. For all the rhetoric of concealment—the impossibility of making innovation explicit or of employing the human voice—the very act of concealment, marked by the deliberate strategies just identified, reveals the innovator—the human author—at work. Notwithstanding its ostensible powerlessness before the authority of the canon, the human voice in ancient Israel was not diminished but augmented. Through its various forms of indirection, it purchased an autonomy sufficient to challenge tradition, sufficient to reject the received understanding of divine punishment and to substitute a new principle of justice. The divine speech of biblical law and prophecy reveals the transformative human voice: the voice of authors, thinkers, writers, passionately engaged with tradition.

The religious creativity of ancient Israel thus poses a challenge to the disciplinary conventions of the science of the History of Religions. It refuses any easy dichotomy between philology and phenomenology, between grammar and spirit, between technical scribal training and religious creativity. The discipline of Biblical Studies receives an equally important challenge. If the History of Religions must come to terms with “text,” so, conversely, must Biblical Studies recognize “meaning” and “spirit” as animating the editorial activity that it seeks to trace in the analysis of syntax and grammar. But the issues extend beyond the academic study of religion.

⁸¹ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer's discussion of “accommodated texts” in “The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament” [1960–61], reprinted in *id.*, *The Semitic Background of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Livonia, Mich.: Dove 1997, 3–58 (at 33–45); Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4, V: Miqṣat Ma'ase ha-Torah* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 10), Oxford: Clarendon 1994, 51, 141 (showing that the citation formula, “it is written,” may refer either to a paraphrase of a text or to no known scriptural text at all); and J.M. Lust, “Quotation Formulae and Canon in Qumran,” in *Canonization and Decanonization* (see n. 2 above), 67–77.

By challenging disciplinary conventions of both method and theory, the paradoxical structure of textual authority in ancient Israel opens out to the humanities. Except for a rather uncontrolled interest in post-biblical rabbinic midrash, which has come to be heralded as a model of textual indeterminacy and deconstructive reading, contemporary theory has all but divorced itself from the study of scripture, from thinking in a sophisticated way about religion. The biblical text, in particular, is regarded as a parade example of an unredeemed text that encodes and perpetuates concepts of power, hierarchy, domination, privilege, xenophobia, patriarchy, and colonialism. The truth is much more complex. The difficulty is that the broader university community is woefully uninformed about how to read the Bible critically, historically, and intellectually. The loss of an historical and of a philological approach to scripture, and the divorce of contemporary literary theory from Biblical Studies and Religious Studies, has transformed the scriptural text into a golden calf, lacking in intellectual complexity, awaiting theory for its redemption.

Once viewed adequately, however, the scriptural canon itself deconstructs the false dichotomies that are repeatedly projected on to it. Theory does not bring hermeneutics or revisionist reading to the ancient text; the text invites the capable reader to recognize the theory latent in it. The canonical text arises from and sustains its own history of reception and interpretation. Although chronologically prior, the canonical source is not ontologically prior, since the past is rethought and interpreted from the vantage point of the present. The authoritative source thus reveals hermeneutics. If canonization conventionally represents an anthologizing attempt to gain closure, then the texts of the Hebrew Bible militate in the opposite direction. They resist any simple notion of canonical authority or of Scripture as one-sidedly divine. They tolerate no such hierarchies or binary oppositions. Properly understood, the canon is radically open. It invites innovation, it demands interpretation, it challenges piety, it questions priority, it sanctifies subversion, it warrants difference, and it embeds critique. "You must not

add anything to what I command you nor take anything away from it.”⁸²

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⁸² This article expands and revises the author's preliminary study, "The Human Voice in Divine Revelation: The Problem of Authority in Biblical Law," in *Innovation in Religious Traditions* (Religion and Society 31), ed. Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox, and Martin S. Jaffee, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1992, 35-71. For valuable criticisms and suggestions, I am grateful to Eckart Otto (Munich), Azzan Yadin (Rutgers), Marc Brettler (Brandeis), Sarah-Grace Heller (Ohio), William A. Malandra (Minnesota), Molly M. Zahn (Oxford), and *Numen's* anonymous referee.

RELIGION AND ETHNICITY: COMMUNITY FORMATION IN THE BRITISH ALEVI COMMUNITY

RON GEAVES

Summary

The article explores the Alevi community, a little-studied Muslim-influenced heterogeneous religious tradition whose roots are in Eastern Turkey, and provides recent fieldwork of the Alevi presence in London which has appeared through migration since the 1980s. This community development is compared with the older Alevi community in Istanbul. The intention is to use the high number of Alevis who live in diaspora communities to analyse the relationship between religion and ethnicity. The author argues, that even though the Alevi revival that has manifested since the 1990s and in which Alevi youth participate visibly, appears to be cultural rather than religious, closer examination of Alevi religious traditions indicates that the forms taken by the revival have their roots in traditional Alevi spiritual beliefs and practices in which values of tolerance, heterodoxy, freedom and justice prevail. The article concludes that although Alevi youth appear to be diverging significantly from their Sunni Muslim counterparts in their respective identity quests, religion plays a significant role for both although the manifestations of revival are almost diametrically opposed. This can be explained by the different manifestations of belief and practice in each community.

A strand in social scientific study looks at religion as a function of ethnicity. Referring to this, Knott has even stated that “the predominant view in Britain and the USA, is that religion is the passive instrument of ethnic identity.”¹ This perspective is exemplified in Francis’ statement that “it is the ethnic group which sanctions a particular church affiliation, and which supports a religious congregation and its institutions as an effective means for its own maintenance and the preserva-

¹ Kim Knott, “The Role of Religious Studies in understanding the Ethnic Experience,” *Community Religions Project Research Paper*, Leeds: University of Leeds 1992, p. 12.

tion of its cultural traditions.”² This viewpoint is helpful for analysing the religious symbols and organisations developed by first-generation migrants, but the relationship between ethnicity and religion in general is complex. Anwar sees ethnicity and religion as distinct variables of identity, independent but interrelated.³ But there are certainly occasions when religion plays a central role in forming ethnic group identity. The following paper explores the Alevi community as an extreme case of a situation where religion seems to have been subsumed beneath cultural identity in the process of community formation. However, the paper will argue that it is necessary also to understand traditional Alevi religious formation in order to understand the direction taken by Alevi youth in their cultural revival of their ancient beliefs and practices.

Alevi is the term used for a distinct religious group that is dominant amongst the Kurdish population around Antakya and Sivas in Anatolia. Since the 1960s, Alevis have been migrating to other parts of Turkey, notably Izmir and Istanbul, and also Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland and Scandinavia. Although the reasons for migration have been essentially economic,⁴ Alevis have also, increasingly since the 1980s, been migrating into Britain and other parts of Western Europe fleeing from persecution and political problems associated with the problems experienced by Kurds in Turkey. It is estimated that Alevis

² E.K. Francis, *Interethnic Relations*, New York: Elsevier 1976, 157.

³ Muhammad Anwar, “Religious Identity in Plural Societies: The Case of Britain,” *The Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 2:2/3 (1980) 110–121.

⁴ Ragnar Naess in a study of Alevis in Norway estimates that approximately 30 per cent of households of the Alevi dominated village of Derekoy receive remittances from Norway and Germany. Derekoy originally had a population of 1200. 200 have migrated to Europe, mostly Norway; 350 have left for Izmir on the west coast of Turkey. The 1985 census estimated a population of 514 remaining in the village (R. Naess, Ragnar “Being an Alevi Muslim in South-western Anatolia and in Norway: The Impact of Migration on a Heterodox Turkish Community,” in *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe*, ed. T. Gerholm and Y.G. Lithman, London: Mansell 1990, 175).

comprise around one-quarter of Turkey's population but figures suggest that they form one-third of Turkish-origin migrants in Germany. The Alevi population in Western Europe provides the possibility to encounter the living presence of a little studied heterodox religious community with close relations to Islam but also to observe a unique development in the relationship between religion and ethnicity.

There is considerable speculation in regard to Alevi origins, including the theory that they were probably part of Shi'a Islam as the term 'Alawi' means a follower of 'Ali ibn Talib, the son-in-law of the Prophet and first Imam of the Shi'a. This view is held by Günter Seufert, who identifies the Alevis as the Shi'a community of Turkey.⁵ Seufert suggests that the Alevis were left behind in Anatolia when the Ottomans severed their ties with the Safavid empire in Iran in the early sixteenth century.⁶ The Alevis to this day demonstrate their affinity with 'Ali by placing his portrait in their homes and places where they gather socially. This account of Alevi identity helps to understand the problems that the tribes experienced with Sunni Ottoman authority; however, their doctrines do not coincide with mainstream Twelver Shi'a, as practised in neighbouring Iran and Iraq. Others have suggested that Alevis have more in common with Isma'ilis, the Sevener form of Shi'a, and have also been influenced by Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.⁷ In spite of the influences of these ancient religions historically on the regions where they originated, however, the main influence on the Alevis comes from both Sunni and Shi'a Islam. 'Ali is the central religious figure and Alevi hagiography and religious history conform to the account of the events after the Prophet's death that forms the basis of Shi'a religious legitimisation.⁸ However,

⁵ G. Seufert, "Between Religion and Ethnicity: A Kurdish-Alevi tribe in Globalising Istanbul," in *Space, Culture and Power*, ed. A. Oncu and P. Weyland, London: Zed Books 1997, 161.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, London: Stacey International 1989, 31.

⁸ Alevis affirm that 'Ali was appointed by the Prophet to be his successor. Before his death, he made a speech concerning Ali, "I am the city of knowledge, Ali is the

the most important figure in Alevi religious life after 'Ali is Hacı Bektaş Veli, the thirteenth century founder of the Bektashi Sufi order. As with most Sufi *tariqas*, the Bektashis originated amongst Sunni Muslims. It is this heterodox coming-together of two distinct traditions of Islam to develop a new form that makes the Alevis unique. It has produced a cultural form distinct from their Sunni neighbours referred to by Alevis as "Alevi-Bektashi culture." Ali Yaman asserts that the Alevis represent "a religious and cultural syncretism which is the result of contacts through the centuries and in different geographies between Turkish masses, and other groups with different beliefs and cultures, resulting in an heterodox understanding of Islam."⁹ Yaman attributes this unique mixing to the prolonged process of migration in Asia Minor.¹⁰ This article accepts Yaman's thesis and further argues that the process of creating Alevi identity continues to be forged through migration processes both inside Turkey and in the European diaspora.

Many observers and insiders have noted that the Alevis do not practice any of the core rites of Islam and it has been suggested that these remote mountain people absorbed the influences of all the major religious traditions that passed through their territory.¹¹ Alevis, however, maintain, that the Islam that formed after the Prophet's death had strayed from the inner path that he revealed. I have already noted the reasons for Alevi discomfort for worship in a mosque but they also do not follow the orthodox Muslim prayer-ritual or face towards Mecca. They assert that the individual can pray in any position

gate of knowledge. How can you come to the city without finding the gate?" When the Prophet died, his family occupied themselves with the funeral rites whilst other close followers began to intrigue for the leadership. Thus Abu Bekir (Abu Bakr) was elected to lead the Muslim *ummah*. Alevis prefer not to pray in the mosque as 'Ali was assassinated in the mosque at Kufr. The Alevis acknowledge all twelve Imams that follow on from 'Ali and the Prophet's grandsons, Hassan and Hussein as in the Twelver Shi'a tradition. Cf. Naess, *op. cit.*, 177–178.

⁹ Ali Yaman, "Kizilbash Alevi Dedes," in *Introduction to Sufi Music and Ritual in Turkey*, Institute of Social Sciences, Istanbul University, n.d., p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 31.

that he or she wants in order to come closer to the divine. Alevis also ignore the month-long fast at Ramadan, preferring to fast on the first ten days of Muharram in remembrance of the martyrdom of Hussein. Fasting is seen as voluntary and many Alevis admit to not fasting at all. The Alevis do not acknowledge any of the Sunni schools of law but the reasons for this once again refer back to the suspect legitimacy of the Sunni version of Islam.¹² Most Alevis argue that schools of law lead to sectarian strife and persecution. In place of traditional Muslim practices, the Alevis have developed their own unique traditions centred around the *cem* (Alevi congregational worship), the *cem-evi* (Alevi place of worship) and the *dede* (Alevi religious leader), and for this reason it is argued that they should be treated as an independent people with their own religious traditions drawn from several sources.¹³

Alevi antipathy to being considered a part of Islam may be derived from the persecution that they have sporadically received from mainstream Sunni Muslims and the lack of interest on the part of Shi'a Muslims to include them in their community or assist them when attacked by Sunnis. The Turkish political situation may make it marginally easier to form a human rights and religious freedom defence of Alevi culture if it is argued that they are a separate religious tradition with the same rights to coexist in secular Turkey as are offered to Christians and other minorities than if they are perceived as a heretical

¹² Alevis believe that the Sunni Caliph, Harun al-Rashid called together the most learned men of his time and asked them to compile the true doctrines of Islam. They refused and acknowledged the supremacy of Ali. The Caliph had them all killed and then formed the four schools of law on the basis of their books. Thus the schools were imposed on the Muslim world without legitimacy (Naess, *op. cit.*, 178).

¹³ The Syrian Alawis have their own holy book called the *Kitab-al-Majmu'* and their doctrines include neo-Platonic emanationist theories, elements of old Babylonian religion, and a belief that the Milky Way contains the souls of the holy. There are also Christian influences especially in regard to the celebration of festivals and reports that initiates go through a ceremony similar to Mass complete with blessed bread and wine which are perceived to symbols of eternal life (*The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 31).

sect within the fold of Islam. Although the Alevis are not part of the mainstream of Islam, and can even be considered to be outside the fold of Islam, they have forged a unique relationship with the Bektashi Sufi order which has created a distinct entity whereby the spiritual teachings of the Sufis are subsumed and transformed into cultural representations in which the Alevis identify themselves as a separate people with their own homeland. In recent times they have been identified with the struggle for an independent Kurdistan.

The Alevis stress ethical behaviour over and above ritual observation and doctrine. A core saying of Alevi belief is, "remember to be master of your tongue, your loins and your hand." From this formula is developed a universal humanistic ethic that places emphasis on right behaviour and condemns religious hypocrisy. These ideas are given religious legitimacy by the third most important figure in the Alevi religious hierarchy, Mevlana Celaleddin (d. 1273), the famous Sufi mystic from Konya better known in the West as Jalaluddin Rumi and founder of the Mevlevi *tariqa*. Celaleddin's poetry is used to provide the basis for Alevi universalist ideas concerning humanity. Religious differences are not considered significant in comparison with human behaviour towards each other.

As stated, the Alevis have always suffered sporadic persecution in Turkey, either because of their heterodox beliefs in which they have insisted upon being defined as a separate religion, or because of their political aspirations for a separate homeland. In the sixteenth century the Ottomans declared war on all forms of Shi'ism and a large-scale Shi'a rebellion in Anatolia was ruthlessly crushed. The Alevis in the region were caught up in the conflict as they had thrown in their lot with the Shi'ites and hoped for intervention from the Safavid emperors in Iran. This occasion is still a strong theme in Alevi poetry and song and remains a central grief-motif at Alevi traditional gatherings. The songs sing of betrayal and isolation and provide an outlet for Alevi emotions in regard to their perceived abandonment. This motif of a suffering minority owes much to the prevailing mood of Shi'a Islam, but the Alevis were protected from more continuous persecution at the hands of the Ottomans through their allegiance with the Bektashi

Sufi order. The Bektashis had become the official guild organisation for the Janissary Corps instituted by the Ottoman sultans as a buffer zone between themselves and the *ulema*. The relationship with the Janissary Corps kept the Bektashi *tariqa* in favour in spite of its heterodox doctrines. However, the association with the Bektashis did not help the relationship between the Alevis and the Sunni *ulema* in the long term. In 1826, the Janissary Corps was abolished and the Bektashis were declared heretics by the orthodox Sunni *ulema*. In the process, the Alevis lost their protector and were further placed at risk by their association with the Bektashis who only survived because their teachings were embedded in the hearts of the Anatolian people.

It is difficult to know whether the Bektashiya was already imbued with many of the ideas of Alevism or whether the *tariqa* came to be influenced by its recruitment from the Alevi population of Anatolia. Certainly once the Bektashiya had become a comprehensive organisation in the fifteenth century, they had incorporated a number of beliefs and practices from the surrounding area of Asia Minor and Kurdistan. So although the Bektashiya claimed to be a Sunni Sufi *tariqa*, they were extremely unorthodox and maintained a strong reverence for the House of Ali that seems to have more in common with the Shi'a. To this day, the Bektashi *tariqa* provides a unique relationship in which the Sufi order provides the spiritual element to the tribes who adhere to Alevi communal and cultural life.

The occasional antagonistic position adopted by the Ottoman authorities, who perceived the Alevis to be a "fifth column" of the Safavids, and persecutions stirred up by the Sunni orthodox view that the Alevis were heretics and blasphemers, both led to periodic slaughters of the Anatolian village populations. The Alevis responded by becoming staunch supporters of the Kemalist Republic and the secularisation of Turkey, hoping to be treated on an equal footing in a new democracy. Throughout the twentieth century they have traditionally supported movements for increased democracy in Turkey, especially those on the left-wing of the political spectrum. However, the continued political problems of the Turkish Republic has resulted in the Alevis finding themselves as much at odds with the political centre

of the new republic as they were with the Ottomans. This situation has been exacerbated as a result of two historical developments. In 1921, the Alevi tribes from the region of Dersim attempted to carve out an autonomous province through a political insurrection. The initiative failed and the tribes were suppressed. The official history of Turkey states that the insurrection was the first attempt to create an independent Kurdish state.¹⁴ Throughout the twentieth century many Kurdish-speaking Alevis linked themselves to the struggle to establish an independent homeland for the Kurds. The other cause of difficulty for the Alevis was the increasing islamisation of Turkey in the second half of the twentieth century. Seufert argues that the new political situation of the Alevis since their attempt to ally themselves with independence and democracy movements has shifted the traditional religious interpretation of events to a discourse of global political and national human rights.¹⁵ However, the Alevis continue to draw upon their religious practices and folk legends as symbols of their struggle for cultural and political autonomy but political activism has pushed religion into the background. Young Alevis in Istanbul throughout the 1970s were more likely to be found involved with left-wing causes and were highly critical of the traditional Alevi holy men, the *dedes*.¹⁶

¹⁴ Seufert, *op. cit.*, 161.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 164. The situation with the *dedes* is complex. On one hand there is an attempt to prescribe the *dede*'s role to one of paid functionary but on the other hand there is a revival of interest that has led to new establishments for training the *dede*. Traditionally the *dede* was the leader of rural Alevi communities. Going back to the time of Hacı Bektas Veli, the *dede* was the spiritual leader combining the qualities of a mystic and a shaman, ruling over a particular Sufi hospice or *dergah* known in Alevi circles as an *ocak* (hearth). Each *ocak* was associated with a lineage of holy men believed to be descendents of the Prophet through the line of Ali. Alevis would be affiliated to a particular *ocak* and the *dede* would assume legal and educational functions as well as religious. They would also lead the community politically. A very good account of the role of the *dede* both historically and contemporary can be found in Ali Yaman's article (*op. cit.*).

Alevis in Britain

Seufert's study of Alevis in Istanbul has noted a cultural revival which he has attributed to an increased confrontation with modernity as a result of domestic migration to urban areas. He argues that the youth are forced to lead more individual lives independent of the community as a result of moving away from traditional areas of resettlement, but choose to restore their Alevi cultural identity in order to provide a self-definition that is different from the outside world. They define their role within their own community by asserting the need for more self-autonomy through emphasising traditional Alevi values such as equality, justice, tolerance, progress and democracy. This cultural revival of Alevi traditions does not imply a parallel awakening of religious adherence, and, on the contrary young Alevis know very little concerning their faith tradition.

I was very interested to observe if the same phenomenon had taken place in Britain, especially since the community was relatively new, remained focused in a small geographical locality of London and maintained a very different living relationship with Sunni Islam. Young Alevis in London were not geographically separated from their parents' generation and any cultural revival associated with loss of religious faith would need to be explained by other causes than those found in Istanbul where the situation was complicated by the loss of confidence in socialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of nationalist and religious movements in Turkey, both contributing to a reassertion of traditional values.¹⁷ I was also aware that the issue of "otherness" which is so essential in forming a distinct ethnic identity would be more complex in London. Alevi ethnicity has developed by creating a clear boundary between itself and that of Sunni Muslims who function as the definite "other."

This is maintained through a number of strategies particularly manifest in perceptions of Sunnis as cruel or oppressive, and marriage to a Sunni Muslim is perceived very negatively. Traditionally it was

¹⁷ Yaman, *op. cit.*, 10.

perceived as reason for expulsion from the community. However, Alevis have perceived their “otherness” in religious terms rather than tribal. For example, marriage between a Turk and a Kurd when both are Alevis does not create any antipathy in the community. In London, however, Alevis would find themselves living alongside their significant “other” as in Turkey, but both groups would be minorities. The Sunni Muslims would no longer be a powerful group and able to impact on Alevi culture in quite the same way. This would impact on the religious practices of the Alevis, as one strategy to deal with difficult minority status has been to practice the ancient Shi’a custom of dissimulation (*taqiyyah*), according to which it is permissible to conceal one’s religious allegiance.¹⁸ Seubert suggests that this was practised in the first decade of migration to Istanbul but I was interested to see if it was necessary in London.

Although Turks have been migrating to Europe and Britain for economic reasons since the 1960s, the late 1980s were witness to a dramatic increase in the proportion of Alevi Turks and Kurds from Anatolia. Most were from the vicinity of Sivas where the situation had been becoming worse as a result of islamisation, resulting in serious sporadic violence and loss of life in the 1990s. Others were affected by the Iraq-Iran war and the difficulties faced by Kurdish minorities.

Most of the new migrants to Britain settled in Tottenham and Dalston in North-East London. They established an Alevi Cultural Centre and *cem-evi* in order to maintain their unique religious practices and the culture that has developed around them. The centre functions as a social focus for the community and contains a tea shop, television and pool table. Around the walls are posters of football teams mixed with portraits of Imam Ali and Haci Bektas Veli. Family groups sat

¹⁸ Alevi reticence manifests as both dissimulation and secrecy. Secrecy pertaining to Alevi esoteric doctrines is a scriptural injunction and along with dissimulation protected the community from antagonistic external forces and helped maintain the internal organisation of the community. There are still many Alevis who hide their true identities for fear of persecution and discrimination in the workplace, at school and from their neighbours.

around drinking tea and soft drinks and conversing whilst their children played pool. The men were absorbed in watching a Turkish football match. There seemed to be little overt religious activity, but traditional *saz* (lute) music could be heard from an adjacent room. The *saz* is used for all Alevi religious and cultural occasions and the mournful songs tell of the greatness of Ali, Hacı Bektas Veli and other historical religious figures interspersed with stories of betrayal, murder and persecution. In this way Alevis maintain their culture through a unique blending of shared history and religious myths and legends. The centre functions to keep the traditions of music and dance (*semah*) alive by passing them on to young people. Further exploration revealed that there is also a *cem-evi* adjacent to the cultural centre and in 1999, the community boasted a resident *dede* who is believed to be the spiritual and hereditary descendent of Hacı Bektas Veli and of the direct family lineage of the Prophet through his son-in-law, Ali.

It would seem that in a very short space of time, this ancient but progressive people has managed to reproduce its unique blending of culture and religion into the new environment of Britain. At a surface level, adaptations had been made in some traditional Alevi customs, but these seemed to do with their concern not to offend the communities living around them and may demonstrate a modified form of *taqiyah*. The traditional sacrifice (*kurbanı*) of a ram at the *cem* ceremony or to remember deceased loved ones has been replaced by purchase of meat at the local market. The same is true of the traditional annual festival (*Abdal Musa Kurbanı*), in which Alevis gather together to share a meal and to seek reconciliation with each other. In the villages this is done in each other's homes but in London it is celebrated in the *cem-evi*. I was informed that in Istanbul, the Sahkulu Sultan Dergahi and Karacaahmet Sultan Dergahi centres hold daily sacrifices in which they feed anyone who wishes to partake of a meal but this has not been replicated in Britain.

The most important traditional gathering, pivotal to the Alevi religious practice, is the *cem* or community worship that takes place in the *cem-evi* on a regular basis. In Anatolia, this traditionally takes place on a Thursday night. A *dede* is essential for this gathering and before the

ceremony acts as an arbitrator and judge to reconcile differences between individual members of the community (*halk mahkemesi*). Those who will not confess or reconcile their grievances are punished by exclusion from the *cem* (*dustunluk*).

In the ceremony itself, the *dede* will sit on a sheepskin with the community in a circle facing each other. There is no segregation of women who fully participate along with children in the *cem*. There are no special dress requirements but participants remove their shoes and perform ritual washing (*abdest*) before entering the ceremony. Central to every *cem* is the traditional Bektashi circle dance or turning (*semeh*). Traditionally, Bektashis were allowed to drink one glass of wine before performing the *semeh*, however, this does not take place in Britain as the Alevis have settled in neighbourhoods with high Sunni Muslim populations and they do not want to offend their sensitivities in regard to consumption of alcohol. Both men and women will turn in the ritual dance, accompanied by the *dede* singing and playing the traditional music on the *saz*. At certain parts of the ceremony, the participants will kneel and prostrate in a very simplified form of the traditional Muslim prayer-rite. The songs encourage the community to love each other and to apply the teachings of Muhammad, Ali, Hacı Bektas Veli and the twelve Imams. At the end of the ceremony, the songs reach an emotional climax as they recall the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein at Kerbala. After the completion of the ceremony, the participants share in a communal meal.

The other major annual event is the twelve day fast in the month of Muharrem. This is generally only observed by very traditional Alevis, but many more will maintain a three day fast in February to honour Hızır (i.e. the Qur'anic Khidr), a supernatural being who is sent by God to save those in distress. The *cem-evi* in Dalston is the centre around which the celebration of festivals and the maintenance of customs revolves, but it also functions as a social and cultural centre which provides lessons in *saz* and *semah*, training in job skills for women, courses on Alevi/Bektashi culture and history, sales of books and recorded music and a variety of other activities ranging from bridal and funeral services to scholarships for Alevi university students.

By 2001, the *cem* ceremony was no longer held on a weekly basis, as the London community no longer maintained a resident *dede*. I was told that it was too expensive to bring a *dede* from Turkey and that the community now managed without one. In many ways there were indications that the community in London was following the same pattern as in Istanbul. The traditional community based around a *dede*/disciple relationship in which the *dede* functioned as community leader, spiritual guide with access to the esoteric teachings, and sometimes even shamanistic leanings seems to have disappeared in London. The closed community united around traditional religious practices led by a *dede* has been replaced to large extent by the creation of an association controlled by a committee who make the decisions as to when a *dede* is required and how he should function. This parallels the situation in Istanbul and West Germany where associations employ a *dede* as a paid functionary and circumscribe his activities.

There is no doubt that the youth in London are active in traditional Alevi activities as their counterparts in Istanbul. In particular, the *semah* and *saz* classes are highly popular with the younger generation, and community performances demonstrate their ability and participation in maintaining Alevi culture. However, these take place on stage in front of an audience and are often accompanied by speeches from prominent Alevi politicians. The younger generation are also active in prominent roles within the association, but I found little in-depth knowledge of Alevi spirituality. None of my informants was able to clarify the relationship between Alevi and Bektashi allegiance although they knew that there was an important distinction in that one can only be an Alevi by birth but access to the Bektashi *tariqa* still requires the individual to join. Whenever I asked questions that probed deeper into this relationship I was requested to speak to a *dede*. Caution has to be taken in regard to interpreting this reticence, as traditionally Alevis did not speak of esoteric matters to outsiders although it has been noted that in recent times they are becoming more open and I would not expect young Alevis living in London to maintain the secrecy of their forefathers in the villages of Anatolia.

Along with the interest in pursuing activities that broaden their knowledge of Alevi culture, young Alevis are also involved in a form of cultural tourism in which they attend an annual festival in August that takes place to honour Hacı Bektas Veli in Anatolia. Although this type of activity is usually associated with traditional pilgrimage to a shrine of a saint, the festival has taken on a number of characteristics that combine together the diverse strands of contemporary Alevi awareness. Elise Massicard has explored the development of the pilgrimage since the 1970s. She explains that the festival initially had to satisfy the Turkish authorities that it was a cultural event containing folk performances, and all religious elements were played down. During the 1970s, the festival organisation passed into the hands of young Alevi political activists keen to democratise the Turkish state. Since the 1980s major political figures have used the festival to make speeches and campaign for support. Alevi associations also mobilise and recruit supporters and use the festival as a springboard for the Alevi cultural revival.¹⁹ Massicard points out that the festival is not a traditional pilgrimage although around 500,000 attend from both Turkey and the diaspora. There is no rigid procedure to follow and visitors are faced with a number of activities. In Massicard's own words:

The most massive scene is the official opening ceremony, with political speeches and *semah* (ritual dance) performances, reported by the media on a national scale. But there are many other places with different activities: the lodge/museum where some perform their rituals regardless of curious tourists and the objection of museum officials; private houses where Bektashis from all over Turkey and beyond gather, exchanging news and views; the streets, mainly a place for commercial and political publicity for parties and movements through tracts and books; ritual places where sacrifices and "superstitious" practices are performed for a chiefly rural population; the public seminar rooms with leading academicians, writers and leaders of associations; the encampments where political groups are caught by security forces; and concert halls overcrowded with young people.²⁰

¹⁹ Elise Massicard, "Uncovering Alevism, Covering Difference," n.d.; cf. website <http://www.isim.nl/newsletter/6/regional/13.html>

²⁰ *Ibid.* 2–3.

This variety of activities combining political, social, cultural and religious activities provides a range of shared symbols that communicate to participants a sense of an Alevi community. Massicard points out that the symbols mean different things to each participant and provide a variety of frames of reference regarding Alevi identity, however the affective sentiment generated is shared by all participants, and thus a “symbolic consensus” is achieved.²¹

Young British Alevis attend the festival in large numbers and through its diverse elements link together a sense of Alevi identity that forms a continuum of shared awareness, combining their anger at political injustices at the hands of the Turkish government to the suffering of Hussein at Kerbala; a cultural performance of *semah* linking them to the esoteric teachings of a Sufi *tariqa*; modern renderings of traditional music that continue to build upon a historical catalogue of songs that contain the heartfelt collective consciousness of a history laden with grief; modern associations and youth camps that maintain a collective identity once cemented together by an ancient bond of master/disciple relationship and the institution of *musahiplik*²² or the traditional institutions of tribe and village.

Seufert is right to point out the influence of modernity on contemporary developments amongst young Alevis, but the discovery of same patterns taking place in London and Istanbul requires an analysis that allows for the differences between the two communities. Seufert makes an interesting comparison with young Sunni Muslims.²³ He points out that the contact with modernity results in a more literate religion which finds itself in conflict with tradition. Thus young Sunnis and Shi‘ites also form associational religious/political organisations that reinterpret practice and text through a “grid of modern values and orientations.”

²¹ *Ibid.* 3.

²² *Musahpilak* is the religious practice of bonding two married couples into a spiritual brotherhood or covenant whereby they promise to take care of each other’s spiritual, material and emotional needs, including those of their children. The bond is considered to be as important as that between blood relatives.

²³ Seufert, *op. cit.*, 166–167.

However, as Seufert rightly points out, there is a crucial difference in that young Sunnis are part of religious resurrection or revival that attempts to restore Islam to dominance over all other forms of social organisation, whereas young Alevis seem to be part of a cultural revival at ease with the secular world that demonstrates a kind of weak religious life “without strong piety.”²⁴

Although young Alevis are just as knowledgeable of religious practices (performance of *cem*, *semeh*, *saz*) and Alevi literature, as their Sunni and Shi‘ite counterparts are of Qur’an and Sunna, they seem to be more at ease with secularisation and its concomitant sense of individual personal freedom. I would argue that the solution to this apparent paradox lies in the respective religious traditions of the two communities rather than the dominance of culture over religion in regard to Alevis. Some social scientists tend to approach religion as passively influenced by modernity without acknowledging that reactions to modernity can also be affected by religious forms. The same argument is equally true of community identity formation or ethnicity. Self-identity quests amongst many young Sunni and Shi‘ite Muslims, especially those in minority communities, often contain a critique of ethnic identity. For example, my own studies in Britain demonstrate that many young Muslims in Britain are increasingly rejecting both assimilation into the mainstream indigenous culture and the ethnocentricity of their parents. Both generations, however, affirm the values of religion. The earlier migrants use Islam to affirm their cultural inheritance and allegiance to life in the place of origin. Religion is used to sanctify and reinforce these transposed customs and traditions and attempt to pass them on to younger generations. The later generations, on the contrary, are developing a religious awareness which has little to do with ethnic solidarity, but instead attempts to discover an Islamic identity that is based on the universals of the faith. Thus many young Muslims in Britain are confounding their parents

²⁴ *Ibid.* 167.

through attempts to separate the essentials of the faith from cultural or ethnic traditions.²⁵

The roots of this assertion of religion over ethnicity can be found in the development of Sunni Islam itself, where a pattern of religious revival based upon reasserting Qur'an and Sunna accompanies social and political upheaval and leads to reforms and renewal of orthodoxy. Alevi religious traditions have a very different pattern from Sunni Islam. They have been a minority throughout their history, heterodox, anti-establishment, syncretist, anti-dogma and doctrines, critical of rigid religious adherence to externals and allowed to hide in times of trouble and persecution. As with their Sunni counterparts, tribal allegiances were subsumed into an overarching religious identity, but the relationship to ethnicity engendered by each respective tradition is very different. Whereas Sunni revival is highly critical of ethnicity, as undermining a universal faith identity, Alevis feel that they can safely move away from traditional religious forms and embrace culture in order to discover their shared identity. However, paradoxically, this stance can be found in the traditional historical forms of Alevi religious tradition. In reassessing their ethnicity, young Alevis are able to drop religious piety in exchange for cultural/political associations that remain formed of diverse elements, heterodoxy, a universal humanistic ethic, anti-tyrannical political establishments and critical of religious dogma and doctrine, even those held by their own parent's generation.

Aykan Erdemir tells the following anecdote which graphically portrays the gap between young Alevis and their elders.²⁶ An old Alevi man has observed a group of youngsters protesting at the death of 37 victims of a Sunni extremist group at a annual youth festival organised in Istanbul.

²⁵ R.A. Geaves, *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain* (Monograph Series, Community Religions Project), Leeds: University of Leeds 1996, 59.

²⁶ A. Erdemir, "Death of a community: Kizibas-Alevi predicament in 1990s Istanbul," paper presented at Boas/Benedict Graduate Student Conference, New York: Columbia University 2000.

I am standing next to an old Alevi man, who must have migrated to Istanbul from one of the eastern Anatolian provinces within the last couple of decades. Earlier that day he was complaining about the festival to the people around him: "What kind of programme is this? These youth should talk about the 12 Imams and the Ehli Beyt (the household of the Prophet) instead of this other stuff."²⁷

However, the old man is later seen crying at the climax of a play put on by the youth re-enacting the events of the slaughter. Erdemir points out that his expression was no different from the faces of religious elders taking part in a *cem* ceremony as they listened to the *saz* player singing the lamentations as Imam Husayn was decapitated.²⁸ The young Alevis are recreating a seamless divide between past and present that embraces religious symbols but uses them to create a cultural unity that deals with the issues they face today, both in Turkey and in migration. Their reaction to the issues of modernity cannot be understood without taking into account Alevi religious traditions and how they allow for a very different manifestation of the religion/ethnicity relationship than that which appears in their Sunni Muslim counterparts. As Naess points out, the term *cem* in Turkish simply means a collectivity. A *cem* can simply be a reunion or gathering together of people. For the Alevis, the religious community of the village could always refer to both the village in itself and simultaneously the lowest level of a hierarchical religious order.²⁹ Thus community and religion are blended into a seamless whole that provides the possibility for young Alevis to negotiate modernity by a revival of culture that may appear on the surface to be a rejection of religious values, but in fact owes its existence to the tolerance and heterogeneity of Alevi forms of Sufism. Thus it is unlikely that young Alevis will give way to the more pronounced religious basis of identity of their Sunni or Shi'ite counterparts but it should not be assumed that this is because religion has lost out to ethnicity, but rather because the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Naess, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

social formations of Alevism are determined by a very different kind of religious heritage.

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LE POUVOIR MORAL ET SPIRITUEL DES FEMMES DANS LE VODOU HAÏTIEN: LA VOIX ¹ DE MAMA LOLA ET DE KAREN MCCARTHY BROWN

CLAUDINE MICHEL

Summary

The article attempts to interpret morality in Haitian Vodou by illustrating its ethical framework in the day-to-day realities of its followers. In so doing, I demonstrate how Vodou as a living system of belief and practice has historically served as the informal infrastructure for morality in Haiti. To this end, I draw upon the work of Karen McCarthy Brown whose work on Mama Lola, a Haitian priestess living in Brooklyn, is an insightful venture into the heart of this widely misunderstood religious and social system. Furthermore, this essay offers the perspective of a very distinctive single voice which emerges from the long and complex dialogue between the multiple voices of the researcher/observer/participant and the many-faceted voices of the priestess/informant. Their diverse perspectives and individual utterances fuse successfully in a powerful articulation of feminist intervention and cultural understanding. Their lives and their work clearly establish how the Haitian religion empowers women and how the *manbo* subtly manifests Haitian female power.

Cet essai s'efforce de présenter la morale du Vodou en illustrant ses composantes éthiques par des exemples pris dans la vie quotidienne réelle des Haïtiens et non celle, totalement fantastique, que l'imagination occidentale a colportée. L'excellent travail de Karen McCarthy, anthropologue blanche féministe, sur Mama Lola, une prêtresse haïtienne qui vit et pratique le Vodou dans le quartier de Brooklyn à New York, sert ici d'illustration. Cette étude exemplaire

¹ J'explique plus loin pourquoi le terme voix est laissé au singulier. Je remercie Mama Lola et Karen McCarthy Brown que j'ai eu l'opportunité de rencontrer plusieurs fois entre 1994 et 2001. Cette recherche n'aurait pas vu le jour sans leur support et participation. Je leur en suis reconnaissante. Merci aussi à Gaëlle Biquet pour son assistance avec le travail de traduction.

et bien informée nous entraîne à la découverte d'un système religieux et social souvent mal compris. Grâce à ses amitiés personnelles avec ses informateurs et à sa compréhension intime de la religion en tant qu'initiée, Brown sait alterner observation et participation dans son traitement de ce terrain culturel qui ne ressemble en rien au milieu dont elle est issue. Plutôt que de plaquer un modèle de morale occidentale sur les préceptes du Vodou, Brown expose les éléments des pratiques et rites vodous qui ont été importés dans la vie sociale des communautés haïtiennes. Elle démontre ainsi que le Vodou, en tant que système vivant de croyances et de pratiques, a servi d'infrastructure morale informelle à Haïti.

Mama Lola et Karen McCarthy Brown: une seule voix qui danse

Cette tentative de définition des formes de la morale dans le Vodou haïtien s'appuie particulièrement sur l'ouvrage *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*,² dans lequel Karen McCarthy Brown, spécialiste de sciences religieuses³ et initiée dans le Vodou,⁴ étudie la vie de

² K. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1991 (2ème éd. 2001). A ma connaissance, le travail de Karen McCarthy Brown dresse à ce jour le portrait le plus authentique de la religion vodoue telle qu'elle est vécue quotidiennement par ses adeptes. Le livre est aussi l'une des rares biographies d'une prêtresse vodoue. Les confessions et observations qu'elle a recueillies pendant plus de dix ans de relations étroites avec sa famille haïtienne n'ont pu l'être que du fait de son appartenance à la communauté.

³ Cf. aussi K. McCarthy Brown, "Olina and Erzulie: A Woman and Goddess in Haitian Vodou," *Amina* 5 (1979), 110–116; *id.*, "Alourdes: A Case Study of Moral Leadership in Haitian Vodou," dans *Saints and Virtues*, éd. J.S. Hawley, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1987, 144–167; *id.*, "Mama Lola and the Ezilis: Themes of Mothering and Loving in Haitian Vodou," dans *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*, éd. N.A. Falk et R.M. Gross, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth 1989, 235–245; *id.*, "Women's Leadership in Haitian Vodou," dans *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, éd. J. Plaskow et C. Christ, San Francisco: Harper and Row 1989, 226–234.

⁴ Cf. K. McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself: The Initiation of a White Woman Scholar into Haitian Vodou," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3:1 (1987), 67–76.

Mama Lola, une *manbo*⁵ dont le pouvoir religieux et l'influence au sein de la communauté sont liés aux vicissitudes de l'existence des membres de cette famille vodoue. Brown décrit le Vodou comme élément de l'existence quotidienne des croyants et comme facteur de *balanse*,⁶ d'équilibre psychologique, social et moral. Consciente de la réputation fantasmée du Vodou en Occident, Brown traite ce sujet d'un point de vue personnel et intime en "élaborant un portrait de cette religion telle qu'elle est vécue par Alourdes⁷ et ses proches."⁸

Brown choisit de laisser parler les croyants en intervenant parfois pour insérer son analyse subjective. Si la justesse de ses observations et remarques est frappante, Brown ne se focalise pas sur l'analyse et la construction théorique de son sujet. En reprenant les textes et commentaires de Karen McCarthy Brown, sa transcription des expériences et des récits imaginaires transmis de génération en génération dans la famille d'Alourdes, et reprenant souvent les mots exacts et expressions de Mama Lola, cet article construit un cadre théorique grâce auquel la morale peut être analysée dans le contexte du Vodou haïtien. Ce cadre est construit en utilisant les voix entrelacées de Mama Lola et de Karen McCarthy Brown comme sources de données primaires qui expriment

⁵ Le mot *manbo* est le terme utilisé dans le Vodou pour désigner celle qui est prêtre dans cette religion; l'homme est un *houngan*. En Créole, il n'y a pas de marque de pluriel pour les substantifs; on dit donc une *manbo* ou des *manbo*.

⁶ Le mot créole *balanse* signifie créer un équilibre, une harmonie; il comporte un aspect métaphysique qui n'est pas vraiment présent dans les termes français "équilibre" ou "balance."

⁷ Le nom utilisé pour Mama Lola dans l'édition de 1991 est Marie Thérèse Alourdes Macena Margaux Kowalski. McCarthy Brown explique comment il n'aurait pas été sage de révéler la vraie identité de Mama Lola à ce moment là; il fallait la protéger contre ceux qui auraient été mécontents des révélations qu'elle faisait sur le Vodou en général et sur la participation tellement répandue de cette religion dans la communauté haïtienne en Haïti et à New York. Dans l'édition de 2001, on apprend le vrai nom de la *manbo*: Alourdes Margaux.

⁸ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 14.

la connaissance développée par les adeptes du Vodou, ainsi que leurs sentiments et opinions.⁹

La vie, les actes et les principes de Mama Lola en tant qu'individu et en tant que prêtresse chargée d'organiser et de diriger les rassemblements religieux de sa communauté vodoue, reflètent les croyances morales de ceux qui *servent les esprits*. Ces croyances, qui proviennent d'une conception du monde ancrée dans un système de valeurs traditionnelles africaines, forment un code éthique qui n'est pas prescriptif et qui n'a pas de transcription écrite. Ce code complexe est transmis de génération en génération et les personnes appartenant à la communauté vodoue sont censées l'apprendre, l'interpréter et le transmettre à leur tour. Brown a mené à bien une tâche difficile en s'appropriant cette autre morale afin de l'expliquer à ses lecteurs.

Plusieurs voix sont présentes dans l'ouvrage de Brown. Il y a bien sûr les voix multiples de Karen McCarthy Brown, tour à tour chercheur, féministe et initiée. Elle sont mêlées à celles de Mama Lola, une Haïtienne en terre étrangère, une mère et une prêtresse. Les voix de Mama Lola se joignent au chœur des esprits qui l'habitent et équilibrent sa personnalité et son image publique. La polyphonie de Mama Lola et la présence de McCarthy Brown dans le texte s'unissent pour ne former qu'une voix qui exprime un engagement commun et une dévotion partagée à la foi vodoue. Les adeptes du Vodou s'identifient en employant l'expression *mwen sèvi lwa* qui signifie "Je sers les esprits." Brown, qui respecte l'aura de Mama Lola en tant que chef spirituel, reconnaît aussi ses obligations à son égard en tant que chercheur et au-delà:

Etre juste dans ma relation avec Alourdes a toujours signifié, entre autres choses, que je ne chercherais pas à l'exploiter, à déguiser mes intentions ou à me détourner d'elle une fois que j'aurais obtenu ce que je voulais. Mes obligations financières, de même que le don de mon temps et de mon énergie, ne pouvaient

⁹ Mon interprétation de ces données, facilitée par ma connaissance personnelle de la religion, est aussi basée sur les entretiens que j'ai eu avec Mama Lola et Karen McCarthy Brown à New York, Los Angeles et Santa Barbara entre 1996 et 2001.

pas se limiter au minimum nécessaire à l'obtention d'informations pour mon livre. Une amitié véritable ne se termine pas parce qu'un livre s'achève.¹⁰

Au-delà de sa contribution scientifique à une meilleure compréhension du Vodou, le travail de Brown arrive de façon magistrale à associer les voix trop souvent dissonantes des féminismes des pays riches et ceux des pays pauvres. La foi personnelle de Brown dans la religion a certainement facilité cela car sa voix est bien souvent celle d'une croyante plutôt que celle du chercheur complètement étranger à son objet. Pendant le temps qu'elle a passé avec Mama Lola pour écrire son livre, Brown est devenue la confidente de la *manbo* et un membre à part entière de la famille. Elle a reçu autant d'encouragements et de sermons que toutes les autres personnes qui venaient consulter Mama Lola pour obtenir aide et conseils. En reconnaissant dans la foi vodoue la source de sa spiritualité, Brown a pris conscience des obstacles que le féminisme occidental dresse sur le chemin de la compréhension des traditions non-occidentales:

Nous [féministes américaines] avons cherché une spiritualité qui nous rendrait plus fortes sans pour autant nous donner du pouvoir sur autrui. . . . Nous avons cherché une spiritualité qui enrichirait notre existence sans nous amener à prétendre connaître des choses que nous ignorons ou détenir une vérité qui serait supérieure à celle détenue par autrui. . . . Pour maintenir ce difficile équilibre, nous avons parfois essayé de réinventer la roue. Le Vodou m'a montré qu'il existe des traditions vivantes . . . qui connaissent depuis longtemps cette spiritualité que nous cherchons.¹¹

Grâce à l'affection réelle qui la lie à Mama Lola, Brown dresse un portrait de son principal informateur qui évite de lui conférer ce que Chandra Mohanty appelle "un statut d'objet," un écueil commun à nombre de féministes occidentales qui ont tendance à dépeindre les femmes des pays pauvres d'une manière uniforme, à grands traits, sans

¹⁰ K. McCarthy Brown, "Writing about the 'Other,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 15 avril 1992, p. A56. Toutes les traductions en français des textes de Karen McCarthy Brown sont de l'auteur; il en est de même pour les autres textes anglais cités dans cet article.

¹¹ McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself" (ci-dessus, n. 4), 75.

s'attacher à leur individualité et à leur position unique dans un contexte culturel particulier.¹² La voix de Brown et sa vision spirituelle s'effacent devant celle de son sujet principal, Mama Lola, rejoignant ainsi l'un des principes fondamentaux du Vodou, à savoir la dissolution de l'individu dans la communauté. Brown remarque: "La sagesse morale du Vodou enseigne que l'individu acquiert une conscience de soi claire et solide lorsqu'il s'implique dans une relation attentive et responsable avec autrui."¹³ Dans sa lecture de l'ouvrage de l'écrivain caribéen Paule Marshall intitulé *Chosen Place, Timeless People*, Hortense Spillers voit dans cette interdépendance de l'individu et de la communauté le paradigme principal des personnages de Marshall qui sont confrontés à une matrice africaine d'histoires, d'individus et de communautés:

L'agent incarne la solution des métaphores des expériences qui l'environnent. L'ontogénèse imite ici la phylogénèse: l'individu construit et est modelé par l'histoire collective. ... En d'autres termes, l'agent est à la fois origine et fin d'une progression figurative complexe. Les personnages incarnent une noble synecdoque parce qu'ils sont la partie qui parle pour le tout et que le tout est présent dans leur partialité.¹⁴

A l'intérieur des contours mouvants de la famille étendue du Vodou, le foyer de Mama Lola crée chez Brown un sentiment de bien-être et d'appartenance. Elle y est toujours bien accueillie et Mama Lola l'appelle affectueusement "ma fille." Dans les rapports intimes qui se nouent entre les deux femmes, le rôle de Brown n'est pas de parler pour Mama Lola mais bien plutôt de l'écouter attentivement. En utilisant cette qualité syncrétistique du Vodou dans la méthodologie de sa recherche, la voix de Brown, celle de l'idéologue et du chercheur, se

¹² C.T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2* 12:3/13:1 (1984), 333-358 (p. 351).

¹³ McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes" (ci-dessus, n. 3), 162.

¹⁴ H.J. Spillers, "Chosen Place, Timeless People: Some Figurations on the New World," dans *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, éd. M. Pyrse et H.J. Spillers, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1985, 154.

mêle à son expérience de la spiritualité. Le résultat de cette union inhabituelle est cet oeuvre remarquable qui rend compte de la complexité du Vodou à travers une voix unique qui puise aux connaissances de disciplines variées et de communautés diverses.

Le Vodou comme moyen de résistance et de continuité

Le Vodou a conservé des liens étroits avec ses origines africaines à cause de l'isolement géopolitique qu'Haïti a subi avant et après le succès de la révolution des esclaves de 1804. Ne disposant pas d'alliés de ce côté-ci de l'Atlantique, les esclaves haïtiens ont tiré leur force de la religion et de la spiritualité qu'ils avaient réussi à préserver dans le Nouveau Monde. Le voyage au-delà de l'Atlantique a arraché physiquement les Africains à leurs pays, leurs cultures et leurs familles. La prise de conscience par les esclaves que l'ordre ancien ne pouvait être rétabli dans le Nouveau Monde a constitué un autre traumatisme: les esclaves étaient issus de groupes ethniques différents et parlaient des langues très diverses, il n'était pas question de reconstruire une société sur les bases de ce qu'ils connaissaient en Afrique. Pour préserver les principales caractéristiques de leur passé, ces Africains du Nouveau Monde ne pouvaient plus compter sur les liens du sang ou l'appartenance à une tribu. Ils devaient formuler une nouvelle conception de la famille fondée sur le Vodou et sur une aspiration commune pour la liberté. Le Vodou est un exemple de ce que Charles Long nomme "la communauté alternative" qui se développe au sein de groupes soumis à l'oppression "en réaction à l'impérialisme et à d'autres formes d'oppression économique et culturelle." Long écrit que "De telles communautés sont souvent directement centrées sur une entreprise religieuse."¹⁵

Pour remédier à leur impuissance dans les sphères sociale et politique, les esclaves d'Haïti s'en remirent à leur foi pour transcender cet état de servitude qui visait à les anéantir. L'imposition des valeurs

¹⁵ C.H. Long, "The Emergence of Religious Value Systems at the level of Popular Religions in the Pacific Rim," Proposal, Pacific Rim Research, University of California: Center for Black Studies, 1993, 11.

européennes et du christianisme fut souvent synonyme de violence et de répression et prit plusieurs formes, du baptême forcé des esclaves aux punitions corporelles pour les pécheurs. Quand les rassemblements publics d'esclaves furent interdits, le Vodou se renforça dans l'illégalité et le secret. Nées dans les plantations d'Haïti, les sociétés secrètes vodoues, comme celle des Marrons, ont continué de prospérer en se dissimulant derrière la façade de la vie quotidienne. Tout au long de l'histoire turbulente du pays, de nombreuses campagnes contre la superstition ont cherché à détruire l'influence du Vodou sur les masses. Ces tentatives ont conduit à la destruction de temples et de sanctuaires vodous, à la persécution des croyants, voire à l'exécution de ses prêtres. Mais les dévots ont été renforcés dans leur foi par cette adversité et sont restés fidèles à la spiritualité africaine. Harold Courlander définit le Vodou comme "l'histoire intime de la race" et voit entre la religion ancestrale et la population haïtienne un lien organique, ontologique:

Le Vodou est partout présent sur la terre d'Haïti, et en un sens, le Vodou est né de la terre. Ce n'est pas un système qui s'est imposé par le haut mais un système qui est né de la base. Il appartient à la famille, c'est un héritage riche et complexe transmis par les ancêtres. . . . Le Vodou est puissant et ne peut mourir. . . . On ne peut détruire ce qui a des racines si profondes.¹⁶

Même après la révolution et l'indépendance, la persécution contre le Vodou s'est poursuivie. Le catholicisme romain, religion occidentale, a maintenu le pays sous son emprise politique et financière jusqu'à la constitution de 1987 qui a reconnu le Vodou comme une religion nationale, à parité avec le catholicisme. Toute l'histoire du pays est marquée par des attaques de grande ampleur contre des communautés vodoues qui ont contraint ces dernières à dissimuler leurs pratiques spirituelles derrière l'iconographie et les rites catholiques. Cette fusion entre la religion occidentale et la cosmologie africaine n'est pas propre à Haïti et les exemples de syncrétisme sont courants dans les Caraïbes et dans les anciennes colonies. Le Vodou haïtien a évolué

¹⁶ H. Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 1939 (rpt. New York: Cooper Square Publ. 1973), 7.

jusqu'à inclure des prières et des hymnes catholiques et beaucoup de cérémonies se déroulent les jours des fêtes des saints catholiques. De même, de nombreux rites ont lieu près des églises et des cimetières. Alors que l'élite haïtienne méprise le Vodou en public, nombre de ses membres sont en fait des pratiquants. C'est pourquoi il n'est pas possible d'établir une distinction formelle entre les deux systèmes dans la foi haïtienne où la religion n'est pas envisagée en tant qu'organisation ou institution mais se fonde sur les besoins spirituels de la communauté dans le but de la protéger. Leslie Desmangles remarque: "si le catholicisme doit survivre à Haïti, il devra accélérer son processus d'Haïtianisation en se liant plus fortement à la culture haïtienne. ... Il doit permettre aux Haïtiens de pratiquer leurs traditions religieuses propres, qu'elles ressortent au Vodou ou à un catholicisme vodouisé."¹⁷

L'influence du Vodou sur l'histoire d'Haïti et sur la vie politique du pays est si grande que l'instauration de la démocratie dépend de la capacité du gouvernement à "réfléter la culture nationale."¹⁸ Fortement ancré dans l'histoire et l'existence quotidienne de ses adeptes, le Vodou n'est pas seulement un mode de vie, c'est la vie elle-même pour la plupart des Haïtiens. Il envahit tous les aspects de l'existence individuelle et aucune décision, aussi triviale soit-elle, ne sera prise sans d'abord envisager ses possibles conséquences religieuses. Comme c'est le cas pour d'autres religions, les adeptes du Vodou recherchent protection et conseil dans les moments difficiles et s'attendent à une punition lorsqu'ils font le mal volontairement. Mais contrairement à d'autres systèmes religieux, le Vodou ne connaît pas d'équivalent du paradis ou de la vie après la mort. La situation de l'âme dépend

¹⁷ L.G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 1992, 181.

¹⁸ P. Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel*, Boulder, Col.: Westview Press 1990, 171. Cet auteur cherche à réhabiliter le Vodou dans les pays occidentaux et notamment aux Etats-Unis. Il défend la culture nationale haïtienne et y voit un moyen d'instaurer la démocratie dans le pays. Il est aussi membre fondateur du Congrès de Santa Barbara (KOSANBA), une association de chercheurs qui se consacrent à l'étude scientifique du Vodou Haïtien. KOSANBA a organisé quatre congrès depuis sa formation en 1997. La cinquième conférence aura lieu à Cuba en Mai 2003.

uniquement du contexte actuel dans lequel évolue la personne, tous les aspects de l'existence acquérant ainsi une signification religieuse. L'ethnobiologiste américain Wade Davis note:

Le Vodou ne peut être séparé de la vie quotidienne des croyants. A Haïti, comme en Afrique, il n'y a pas de séparation entre ce qui est sacré et ce qui est séculier, entre le sacré et le profane, entre le monde matériel et le monde spirituel. . . . Le Vodou incarne un ensemble de concepts religieux, il prescrit un mode de vie et une éthique qui règlent les comportements sociaux.¹⁹

Le Vodou n'est pas seulement un moyen de revitaliser les traditions africaines ancestrales mais aussi une façon de s'organiser, de résister et d'agir.

La section suivante vise à dissiper les fausses représentations qui entourent le Vodou et à clarifier la signification de cette religion. Ceci renforce l'idée que le Vodou n'est pas uniquement une foi individuelle et un ensemble isolé de croyances et de pratiques. Au contraire, le Vodou est un système religieux complexe qui permet de réaliser des guérisons collectives et qui ne sépare pas besoins spirituels et réalité de l'action.

Dans le signe, on trouve le sens

Les orthographes différentes d'un même mot²⁰ suggèrent des sens différents. Pendant des années, les chercheurs ont débattu l'hypothèse que le mot *Vodou* soit d'origine dahoméenne. Il serait dérivé du mot *fon* signifiant "dieu" ou "esprit." Cette orthographe permet de le distinguer du mot *Voodoo* créé et utilisé dans le monde anglo-saxon. Aujourd'hui, les chercheurs, dans un souci de retour aux origines

¹⁹ W. Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, New York: Warner Books 1985, 72–73.

²⁰ Le terme *Voodoo* (parfois prononcé *Hoodoo* [Houdou] lorsqu'il fait référence à une forme de Vodou pratiquée à la Nouvelle-Orléans et dans d'autres villes du sud des Etats-Unis) est le plus utilisé aux Etats-Unis. On dit plutôt *Vaudou* en France. Le terme haïtien *Vodoun* se rapporte à une danse rituelle. Le terme *Vodun*, même s'il est plus précis étymologiquement, est moins commun que *Vodou* que la communauté scientifique haïtienne semble préférer, en partie pour créer une certaine unité linguistique.

africaines et d'authenticité, rejettent les orthographes communément employées dans les pays occidentaux comme *Vaudou*, utilisée par la communauté francophone, ou *Vodou*, et leur préfèrent les termes *Vodun* ou *Vodoun*. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith par exemple emploie *Vodun*, qui selon lui dériverait de deux mots, *Vo* et *Du* qui signifieraient "introspection dans l'inconnu."²¹ Le fait de rebaptiser cette religion *Vodun* entre dans le cadre plus large d'un mouvement de redéfinition et de reconstruction des origines, de la signification et de l'influence sociale et politique de la religion. Le mot *Voodoo*, pure création anglo-saxonne, renvoie une image déformée de la religion comme superstition ou sorcellerie qu'accompagnent sacrifices sanglants et orgies. A travers des films comme "True Believers," "Angel Heart," "Marked for Death" et "The Serpent and the Rainbow," la culture populaire américaine diffuse une certaine vision du *Voodoo* qu'elle présente comme une religion destructrice et malfaisante. Aux Etats-Unis, le mot *Voodoo* est utilisé couramment pour qualifier de façon désobligeante quelque chose de magique ou miraculeux ou quelque chose de trompeur, voire de diabolique.²² Cette vision qui n'est fondée que sur des préjugés est largement reprise dans les pays occidentaux et dans la presse étrangère. Elle est censée apporter la preuve du retard haïtien alors qu'elle n'est que l'expression du pire ethnocentrisme. De nombreuses publications mais aussi des dictionnaires, magazines ou revues scientifiques, véhiculent aussi cette image avilissante du Vodou et d'Haïti.²³

²¹ Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti*, 13.

²² Par exemple, George Bush père lors de sa campagne électorale a fait référence au programme d'un de ses adversaires politiques en le qualifiant de "voodoo economics." Le terme est depuis lors très employé. Il existe un livre de Kay Nelson destiné à améliorer la productivité des utilisateurs d'ordinateurs Macintosh intitulé *Voodoo Mac: Tips & Tricks with an Attitude* (1992). Le sous-titre est lui aussi gênant: ne dit-on pas souvent aux Etats-Unis que les Noirs Américains "ont une attitude?" Ce sont là deux exemples parmi plusieurs autres que nous pourrions citer.

²³ [Le vodou est] "un ensemble de rites et de pratiques primitifs basé sur la croyance dans la sorcellerie et dans le pouvoir des fétiches, des talismans, etc. ... que l'on trouve parmi les autochtones des Indes occidentales et dans le sud des Etats-Unis et

Dans son article sur le caractère social de la religion à Haïti, Glenn R. Smucker postule que “le culte des ancêtres est fondamentalement apolitique.”²⁴ Cette assertion, et les concepts qui l’accompagnent la plupart du temps, nie le rôle que le Vodou a joué dans la révolution haïtienne, dans la résistance à l’occupation américaine, dans l’avènement et la chute du gouvernement Duvalier, et plus récemment dans la résistance contre la seconde occupation américaine.²⁵ De plus, dans les campagnes haïtiennes, le Vodou a des liens avec les questions de répartition des terres et leur administration, y compris la résolution de conflits. En ville, le Vodou est impliqué dans les affaires associées au *lakou*, les zones résidentielles urbaines.

dont l’origine est africaine,” *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (1964). Vingt ans plus tard, le *Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* (1986) propose toujours cette définition douteuse : “une religion dérivée du culte africain des ancêtres pratiquée principalement par des Nègres [*sic*] à Haïti et caractérisée par des rites propitiatoires et des trances qui mettent en communication les croyants et des divinités animistes.” Cette réponse d’un missionnaire américain à une question qui lui est posée par un médecin au sujet du SIDA révèle d’autres stéréotypes et conceptions erronées : “C’est le vodou qui est le vrai démon ici. C’est une religion démoniaque, un cancer qui mange Haïti. Le vodou est pire que le SIDA. Saviez-vous que lorsqu’un homme veut devenir houngan, il doit sodomiser un autre homme ? Non bien sûr, vous ne le saviez pas ! Que peut-on attendre de ces gens après cela ?” *Life magazine*, août 1987, 62.

²⁴ G.R. Smucker, “The Social Character of Religion in Rural Haiti,” dans *Haiti, Today and Tomorrow: An Interdisciplinary Study*, éd. C. Foster et A. Valdman, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America 1984, 35-56 (p. 54). Cette déclaration est très surprenante, surtout émanant de G.R. Smucker, l’un des anthropologues et consultants en développement ayant à cœur les questions sociales et politiques d’Haïti et soucieux d’aider ce pays. On rapporte que Smucker connaît bien le pays; il parle, par exemple, un créole parfait, ce qui est rare pour un étranger.

²⁵ En octobre 1993, quand les marines américains ne purent débarquer, les Haïtiens prétendirent avoir repoussé les journalistes étrangers grâce à une poudre préparée par des adeptes du Vodou. La majorité des Haïtiens ne détiennent pas d’armes et pour éviter que ne se reproduisent les horreurs de l’occupation américaine de 1915, les gens avaient préparé des potions pour repousser les marines s’ils mettaient le pied sur l’île. Tous les Haïtiens, qu’ils soient partisans de l’armée ou d’Aristide, étaient d’accord pour refuser l’intervention étrangère.

L'anthropologue Michel Laguerre fait partie des chercheurs qui ont lutté contre les fausses représentations du Vodou et ont constamment rejeté l'affirmation selon laquelle cette religion est apolitique. Il a publié un certain nombre d'études qui prouvent qu'un lien étroit existe entre le Vodou et la politique haïtienne en montrant par exemple que les sociétés secrètes "forment un groupe paramilitaire ayant des connexions avec les temples vodous."²⁶ Desmangles consacre lui aussi une partie importante de son ouvrage, *The Faces of the Gods*, à l'étude approfondie du cadre historique et politique qui a formé la religion Vodou.²⁷ La question n'est pas cependant nouvelle. L'un des premiers chercheurs à avoir suggéré le rôle révolutionnaire joué par le Vodou est C.L.R. James qui écrivait déjà en 1938: "Le Vodou est un moyen de conspirer."²⁸ Dans *Passage of Darkness*, Wade Davis décrit l'idéologie politique des sociétés secrètes vodoues et des communautés de Noirs marrons du temps de la colonie et met en valeur leur rôle à la fois dans l'avènement et dans la chute du régime Duvalier.²⁹ Il montre comment la *zombification*,³⁰ forme ultime de sanction dans

²⁶ M. Laguerre, *Vodou and Politics in Haiti*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1989; cf. aussi *id.*, "Politics and Vodou Still a Potent Combination in Haiti," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 avril 1986, 19; et *id.*, *Voodoo Heritage* (Sage Library of Social Research 98), Beverly Hills, CA: Sage 198.

²⁷ Cf. ci-dessus, n. 17.

²⁸ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, New York: Vintage Books 1963 (1ère éd. 1938), 86.

²⁹ W. Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 1988.

³⁰ La *zombification* fait référence à des cas très rares en Haïti de transformation d'un individu en *zombie*. Un poison est administré à une personne et on la tient pour morte. Ce poison est en effet si violent qu'il fait disparaître tout signe de vie. La personne est ensuite réveillée par le sorcier qui l'utilise plus tard pour travailler pour lui gratuitement. Ce procédé provoque l'amnésie du *zombie* et peut aussi entraîner des perturbations physiques et mentales. Il est intéressant de noter dans le cadre de ce travail sur la morale que la personne changée en *zombie* est souvent quelqu'un que la société a rejeté parce qu'il est considéré comme responsable de crimes contre sa famille et la communauté. Les juges populaires décident ainsi de le punir par la *zombification*. C'est une forme de justice populaire que l'on retrouve aussi au Kenya

le monde du Vodou, est un moyen de maintenir l'ordre social et politique dans les communautés locales. Bellegarde-Smith appelle ces sociétés *goverman lannuit* (gouvernement de la nuit) qui dirige pendant que le vrai gouvernement dort. Il montre comment dans la campagne haïtienne, à l'écart de tout contrôle politique officiel, les communautés vodoues sont plus respectées que craintes "car elles rendent la justice dans un environnement démocratique" (si la démocratie est définie comme un gouvernement du peuple pour le peuple). Elles dirigent "un système judiciaire parallèle à celui contrôlé par les élites du gouvernement."³¹ Dans son livre, Bellegarde-Smith défend l'hypothèse selon laquelle la signification de la religion vodoue dans l'histoire haïtienne est profonde et irréfutable.³²

Dans un contexte d'opposition à cette religion, écrire sur la morale et le Vodou peut sembler paradoxal; l'image du *Voodoo* semble s'opposer à la vertu et au bien. Par la plus grande ironie, les Haïtiens conçoivent le christianisme comme une condition préalable du Vodou et peu d'Haïtiens jugent la pratique du catholicisme incompatible avec le service des esprits. Ce sont les mêmes saints que l'on retrouve sur l'autel du *hounfor*, le temple Vodou. Malgré les stéréotypes négatifs qui continuent de prospérer dans les médias populaires, les historiens et les chercheurs qui s'intéressent à l'histoire culturelle ont depuis longtemps reconnu la valeur du Vodou, non seulement pour comprendre la dynamique cachée de l'histoire turbulente d'Haïti, mais aussi pour expliquer les changements politiques et sociaux à l'œuvre aujourd'hui dans cette région des Caraïbes. Sous plusieurs aspects, le Vodou satisfait les mêmes désirs et besoins que n'importe quelle autre religion, ainsi que Courlander le suggère: "En résumé, [le Vodou] est

("mob justice"). Cette forme de peine capitale imposée par la volonté du peuple est-elle très différente, par exemple, de la peine de mort dans d'autres sociétés?

³¹ Bellegarde-Smith, *Haïti*, 169.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

une religion véritable qui essaye de lier le monde connu à l'inconnu et d'établir un ordre là où sans lui, il n'y aurait que chaos."³³

La morale du Vodou comme résultante de l'éthos africain

Le monde Vodou fait montre d'une orientation éthique particulière fondée sur l'expérience humaine et sur la conception ontologique africaine de la femme et de l'homme et de leurs relations. Plusieurs religions monothéistes, Christianisme, Islam et Judaïsme, sont prescriptives; les fidèles tirent de textes sacrés des principes généraux d'évaluation morale. Les choses sont plus compliquées dans le Vodou. Comme la religion haïtienne ne possède pas un code éthique écrit, les personnes doivent trouver et définir leur propre moralité. Les adeptes du Vodou doivent *balanser*, équilibrer leur existence de façon à suivre une voie morale sur laquelle ils sont guidés par l'éthos africain prédominant dans cette religion. Dans la cosmologie vodoue, la morale est dynamique, fluide et contextuelle, à l'instar de la vie elle-même.

Mama Lola et les membres de sa famille vodoue ont transmis à Brown une image de la vie morale de ceux qui servent les esprits et qui s'articule autour de cinq principes qui seront examinés dans la suite de cet article: l'importance de la communauté, le respect des anciens, le globalisme, l'esthétique noire, les stratégies de guérison et le sens pratique. Le sens de la conscience collective est perceptible dans tous ces domaines lorsque le moi et le monde extérieur convergent, mélangeant forme et contenu dans une même esthétique. Toutefois le Vodou ne propose aucun absolu, aucune généralité, seulement des possibilités thématiques qui indiquent comment la vie devrait être vécue. Dans l'introduction de *Mama Lola*, Brown pose quelques jalons qui permettent de comprendre comment la morale fonctionne dans le Vodou:

Les esprits vodous ne sont pas des modèles pour une existence parfaite. Ils reflètent plutôt la gamme des possibilités liées à un aspect de la vie auquel ils président. Les observateurs qui n'ont pas compris cela ont eu tendance à

³³ H. Courlander, "Vodou in Haitian Culture," dans *Religion and Politics in Haiti*, éd. T.L. Stoddard, Washington, DC: Institute for Cross-Cultural Research 1966, 12.

dépeindre les esprits vodous comme des démons, voire à conclure que le Vodou était une religion sans morale, ce qui est une erreur manifeste.³⁴

L'importance de la communauté

Sim salalam, sa salawu. Pa salaam, pa salawu

Tu es dedans, Tu es dedans; Tu es dehors, Tu es dehors. (Mama Lola)³⁵

Le lien entre les individus est établi de fait. La séparation nécessite un effort et une explication. (Karen McCarthy Brown)³⁶

Une forme d'humanisme communautaire pourrait expliquer la dépendance des Haïtiens entre eux. Dans le monde haïtien, les personnes tirent leur énergie et leur conscience de soi de leurs relations avec autrui, ce qui permet à une entité collective de supplanter la plupart des individualités. Traditionnellement, les Haïtiens, comme les Africains, ne sont pas individualistes. Ils arrivent difficilement à se concevoir comme des individus indépendants. Comme le dit Brown, "Le lien entre les individus est établi de fait. La séparation nécessite un effort et une explication."

Cette idée est reprise dans la sagesse pratique de Mama Lola: "Tu manges avec les gens, tu as toujours de la nourriture. Tu manges tout seul, tu n'as rien."³⁷ Selon elle, l'équilibre de la personne est préservé si elle acquiert le respect de la collectivité en conservant des relations responsables avec les membres de la communauté et en évitant de nuire à autrui: "Quant on fait du mal aux autres, le mal vous tombe dessus en retour."³⁸ Mama Lola n'utilise pas sa connaissance du Vodou pour nuire à autrui. Elle voit, sert, aide et soigne.

³⁴ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 6–7.

³⁵ Joseph Binbin Mauvant, l'arrière-grand-père de Mama Lola, utilisait ces termes africains pour faire la distinction entre les membres de la famille et les autres. Comme l'ont fait avant elle sa mère et sa grand-mère, Mama Lola utilise cette expression quand elle doit invoquer les pouvoirs de son arrière-grand-père, notamment lorsqu'elle doit procéder à une guérison difficile. Voir McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 70.

³⁶ *Mama Lola*, 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

La famille est le premier endroit où se manifeste le sens de la communauté. C'est une institution respectée qui prépare l'individu à son entrée dans la communauté. Les enfants, qu'ils soient neveux, nièces, cousins ou voisins, constituent la force du foyer. Très tôt, les gens sont conscients que les enfants continuent la chaîne de la vie et mourir sans enfants est certainement le pire sort que l'on puisse connaître sur terre. Les Haïtiens, et en particulier les femmes, mères et grands-mères, estiment que les enfants qu'elles ont mis au monde leur appartiennent et qu'elles en ont la responsabilité jusqu'à l'âge adulte, voire même après si c'est nécessaire. Une fois adultes, les enfants ne quittent vraiment le foyer qu'après leur mariage. Dès lors, on attend d'eux qu'ils contribuent financièrement au bien-être du groupe, même lorsqu'ils ont eux aussi des enfants et un foyer. Les enfants les plus âgés doivent s'engager financièrement et moralement dans l'éducation de leurs frères et sœurs plus jeunes. Un grand respect et une attention constante sont portés aux personnes âgées et aux enfants. Beaucoup de proverbes haïtiens expriment la dette de la société envers les enfants qui sont un don de Dieu: "Un seul enfant n'est pas un enfant"; "les enfants sont la seule richesse." Brown rend compte de cette particularité culturelle quand elle dit: "Pendant mes visites en fin d'après-midi ou en début de soirée, les enfants me grimpaient littéralement dessus."³⁹

Rien n'est immoral selon les principes humanistes du Vodou si cela permet à une personne de remplir ses obligations envers ses enfants. Mama Lola déclare ainsi à Brown: "Une femme doit faire beaucoup de choses. Pas vrai? J'ai fait ça [travailler comme Marie Jacques] pour nourrir mes enfants. Je n'ai pas honte. Tu dois mettre ça dans ton livre. Parce que c'est la vérité."⁴⁰ Dans l'éthique d'Alourdes, la morale dans

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ McCarthy Brown, "Writing about the 'Other'" (ci-dessus, n. 10), p. A56. Travailler comme Marie Jacques est une forme de prostitution en Haïti. Contrairement à d'autres formes, la rémunération n'est pas discutée avec le client. Néanmoins, les hommes sont censés laisser de l'argent à la femme après leur entrevue.

son acception la plus absolue ne doit pas passer avant le bien-être de la communauté, dans ce cas, celui de ses enfants.

La famille étendue est sans doute la caractéristique dominante de la société haïtienne, à Haïti comme à l'étranger. Elle définit le statut de la famille, influence les décisions qui ont une conséquence sur le futur de la famille, affecte le temps réservé à chacun, contrôle la richesse et distribue les compliments et les reproches. Mama Lola vit avec deux de ses fils, sa fille Maggie et ses deux enfants, et elle offre souvent le gîte à des membres de sa famille vodoue qui sont dans une mauvaise passe ou à des clients qui suivent un traitement. L'un des ses fils, William, est un handicapé mental. L'idée de le mettre dans une institution spécialisée n'a jamais effleuré l'esprit de Mama Lola puisque la tradition haïtienne veut que les personnes âgées, les malades et les handicapés aient leur place dans le foyer. Les règles de l'hospitalité de Mama Lola sont strictes: elle ne pourrait pas imaginer que Brown ne passe pas la nuit chez elle après la fête d'anniversaire de l'un des esprits. "Je m'en fiche. Tu dormiras peut-être par terre, ou je te ferai un lit en haut de mon placard. . . . Je trouverai toujours une place pour toi, ma chérie."⁴¹

Les histoires et les souvenirs sont le trésor partagé par toute la famille. Les histoires des anciens, leurs expressions et dictons favoris unissent les différents membres de la famille dans une même sagesse. Mama Lola exprime sa conception des liens familiaux à travers les mots de son arrière-grand-père, Joseph Binbin Mauvant, qui disait souvent dans sa langue africaine: *Sim salalam, sa salawu. Pa salaam, pa salawu*. ("Tu es dedans, tu es dedans. Tu es dehors, tu es dehors.")⁴² Mama Lola s'appuie sur cet adage, non seulement pour se souvenir de cet ancêtre important, mais aussi pour transmettre à sa famille le sens des obligations réciproques. Par ces mots, elle leur demande de ne pas oublier combien faire partie d'une famille rend puissant: quand la famille est là pour vous, vous pouvez compter sur elle. Mais on doit en prendre soin car si on la perd, on ne la retrouve pas facilement. Brown explique que parce qu'elle était *blan* (blanche), certains membres de la

⁴¹ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 39.

⁴² Cf. ci-dessus, n. 35.

famille de Mama Lola étaient soupçonneux à son égard et la recevaient assez mal lorsqu'elle rendait visite à Alourdes dans les premiers temps. Ils n'étaient pas prêts à l'accepter tout de suite dans la famille. Mais après avoir été acceptée, le groupe rappelle souvent à Karen qu'elle fait partie de la famille: "Tu es dedans. Tu es de la famille."⁴³

Le soutien de la communauté prend la forme de cadeaux réciproques échangés entre les vivants et entre les vivants et les esprits, ce qui renforce l'idée qu'ils appartiennent au même monde, bien qu'ils soient à des étapes différentes de leur voyage spirituel. Les rituels permettent de traverser le pont et les ancêtres rencontrent vraiment les vivants. Les *sèvis*⁴⁴ représentent une possibilité de participer à la vie de la famille vodoue et d'offrir des sacrifices et des cadeaux en remerciement et en soutien. Ce que l'on donne, et cela peut aller d'un don matériel à un don spirituel, est déterminé par la place que l'on occupe dans la

⁴³ Ceci rappelle l'expérience de Carol Stack, une autre anthropologue blanche qui a décrit son intégration dans une famille noire américaine dans *All our Kin*, New York: Harper and Row, 1974. Cette famille l'appelait affectueusement "White Carol" (Carol blanche) pour la distinguer d'une femme noire membre de cette famille qui portait le même prénom.

⁴⁴ Une cérémonie vodoue est appelée *sèvis*, un *service*, un vocable qui évoque déjà ce qu'une cérémonie représente. Il s'agit d'honorer les esprits vodous et de les servir. D'autres cérémonies vodoues ont des noms plus spécifiques comme *manje les anges* (repas rituel destiné aux esprits, les *lwa*) (notez l'orthographe qui reste la même au singulier et au pluriel pour le mot *lwa* que les chercheurs contemporains utilisent au lieu des formes plus traditionnelles *loa* ou *loas*), *manje marasa* (repas rituel destiné aux esprits des jumeaux), *manje pov* (repas rituel destiné aux pauvres). La nourriture donnée permet aux esprits de participer à la vie humaine et de renforcer la relation entre les vivants et les morts. Le *manje pov* est l'occasion d'inviter des gens pauvres et des mendiants à partager un repas et pour l'hôte de recevoir leur bénédiction. Ces personnes peu fortunées n'ont plus de famille qui les protège de la souffrance et du malheur et "par la logique inversée du vodou . . . elles peuvent protéger les familles de la malchance" (McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 201). En Haïti, manger est une activité qui conserve la vie sous plusieurs aspects. C'est un moyen de conserver des liens. Au lieu de présenter McCarthy Brown de façon formelle, Mama Lola fait part des liens étroits qui les lient en disant simplement: "Elle mange chez moi" (cf. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 43).

famille, et par les moyens matériels dont on dispose. Karen McCarthy Brown explique:

Le mérite s'acquiert en conservant des relations responsables, des relations caractérisées par le don judicieux de cadeaux matériels (nourriture, logis, argent) et immatériels (respect, déférence, amour). Si les choses se passent bien, ces cadeaux sont échangés dans le cercle continu des vivants et des ancêtres morts. Dans le cycle ininterrompu de don et de contre-don, chacun donne et reçoit selon sa place dans la hiérarchie sociale, une hiérarchie pesante et omniprésente qui inclut tout le monde, de l'enfant le plus jeune à l'esprit le plus âgé et le plus austère. Une personne morale est donc celle qui donne ce qu'elle doit donner en accord avec ce qu'elle est.⁴⁵

Contrairement au monde occidental où les conventions sociales exigent que l'on se préoccupe d'autrui, le monde Vodou se caractérise par des attentes de la communauté. Ignorer les responsabilités familiales, mettre en danger les intérêts de la communauté, négliger les *lwa*, les esprits vodous, sont des affaires morales sérieuses et des offenses graves qui entraînent la désapprobation, voire l'ostracisme du groupe. Ces actions peuvent avoir une conséquence plus terrible en mettant en cause la protection que les esprits offrent.

*Respect pour les anciens, ceux qui détiennent la konesans*⁴⁶

Tu viens après six mois d'absence, presque un an, et tu ne dis même pas Bonjour, comment ça va Mama Lola? Tout de suite, tu me demandes de faire quelque chose pour toi. (Mama Lola)⁴⁷

La jeune enfant qui imite les mots de sa mère et dit qu'elle les a trouvés toute seule est une enfant qui fait semblant d'être ce qu'elle n'est pas encore. (Karen McCarthy Brown)⁴⁸

⁴⁵ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 6–7.

⁴⁶ Le mot créole *konesans* signifie la même chose qu'en français mais il comporte aussi un aspect métaphysique; c'est une forme *profonde* de connaissance qui s'accompagne de la sagesse qui vient souvent de l'expérience. Les aînés ont la connaissance mais c'est aussi une caractéristique des morts, des ancêtres et des esprits du panthéon vodou.

⁴⁷ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 2.

⁴⁸ McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself" (ci-dessus, n. 4), 74.

Cette déclaration de Brown est issue de sa réflexion sur une rencontre avec sa mère vodoue à l'occasion de laquelle une de ses remarques, inspirée par un féminisme très occidental, avait paru totalement déplacée. Elle avait dit: "Je suis seule responsable de ma vie," ce qui avait plongé Mama Lola dans un "profond silence pendant une bonne partie de la journée." Brown écrit: "Quand [Alourdes] parlait avec les autres, ses paroles m'étaient en fait destinées . . . 'Karen dit qu'elle est seule responsable de sa vie. Ehh!'"⁴⁹ C'était certainement une erreur: Personne ne parle ainsi à une personne plus âgée, et notamment à une personne dont le rôle de prêtresse est justement d'être responsable de la vie des autres, de créer un équilibre entre les membres de la famille vodoue et de la communauté en général.

On retrouve la même chose dans les premiers mots qu'Alourdes adressa à Théodore, un jeune Haïtien qui était devenu l'ami de Brown et qui avait proposé de la présenter à Mama Lola. Théodore ne lui avait pas rendu visite depuis un an et Mama Lola le punit pour son indolence et sa négligence. Elle le réprimanda sur le seuil de la porte "Et tu ne dis même pas 'Bonjour Mama Lola, comment ça va?'" Cette déclaration est encore un exemple qui montre que les mots ont parfois un sens plus profond qu'il ne semble. Théodore lui avait certainement dit bonjour en entrant dans la maison. Les paroles de Mama Lola se réfèrent sans doute à ce salut désinvolte de Théodore qu'elle a perçu comme un manque de respect et de déférence. Théodore a manqué de respect parce qu'il n'a pas exprimé un intérêt particulier pour elle, sa santé ou pour sa famille.

Elle redevient chaleureuse lorsqu'elle l'embrasse un peu plus tard et dit: "Théodore est comme mon enfant! Même quand je ne le vois pas, je sais qu'il pense à moi."⁵⁰ Il est très important de montrer l'affection que l'on éprouve pour les personnes que l'on aime mais on ne laisse pas passer une occasion de rappeler aux jeunes générations leurs devoirs envers leurs aînés, qui en raison de leur âge ou de leur

⁴⁹ *Ehh!* Cette interjection en créole haïtien signifie *incroyable, inconcevable*. Elle exprime l'incrédulité face à quelque chose qui manque d'équilibre (*ibid.*, 74).

⁵⁰ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 3.

statut (les deux sont souvent liés), méritent un grand respect dans la société haïtienne. Un proverbe noir américain dit d'ailleurs: "You don't get old being no fool" (les gens âgés ont beaucoup d'expériences et de sagesse). Un proverbe igbo dit quant à lui: "What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing" (Ce qu'un vieil homme voit assis, un homme jeune ne peut le voir debout). Avec les années viennent l'expérience, la sagesse et la *konesans* qui doivent susciter un profond respect chez les jeunes générations. Être vertueux, c'est aussi s'occuper des aînés, les entourer, leur donner à manger, leur donner de l'argent, les habiller mais aussi leur montrer de l'amour, du respect, de la déférence et de la reconnaissance.⁵¹

Le Vodou honore tous ceux qui portent en eux la *konesans*, ce qui inclut les esprits, les ancêtres et les morts qui communiquent leur sagesse à travers les rêves et les transes de possession. Les respecter, les honorer, les servir sont des actions essentielles de la religion. Les visites au cimetière sont fréquentes mais il arrive plus souvent qu'on les salue pendant les cérémonies et les rituels, les services vodous. D'un autre côté, les *lwa*, les dieux du panthéon Vodou, protègent les vivants et servent de médiateurs entre Dieu ou *Bondye*, le dieu suprême, et les humains avec leurs problèmes (santé, histoires d'amour, travail, argent, problèmes familiaux, les contrariétés de la vie en général).

Liés par des obligations réciproques, les *lwa* servent les humains autant que ceux-ci les servent. . . . Les dieux sans croyants sont bien malheureux! Pour leur part, les ancêtres font respecter des lois fort raisonnables et le système de croyances du Vodou est destiné à fournir une morale collective.⁵²

Si l'on ne sert pas convenablement les *lwa*, si l'on ne respecte pas ses aînés ou si l'on traite mal les pauvres, on œuvre à la destruction de la communauté. Ceci peut produire un déséquilibre dans la vie de la personne qui s'est écartée des valeurs traditionnelles de la société et

⁵¹ Même si quelques Noirs-Américains sont contraints, de par leur mode de vie difficile, de placer leurs parents dans des hospices, cette pratique est considérée comme totalement immorale par les populations d'Afrique et des Caraïbes.

⁵² Bellegarde-Smith, *Haïti*, 16.

attirer le mauvais sort sur elle ou sur sa famille, ou alors provoquer un “choc en retour” pour les vivants.

Globalisme

Je ne mange pas aujourd’hui. (Mama Lola)⁵³

Le Vodou opère comme un système moral non pas en prenant ce qui est bien dans l’existence et dans le comportement humain et en le magnifiant mais plutôt en prenant toute la vie et en l’intensifiant tout en la rendant plus compréhensible. (Karen McCarthy Brown)⁵⁴

Le concept de l’unité de l’être est fondé sur le principe d’unicité et d’unité de toutes les forces de la nature, dans l’idée d’une interdépendance et d’une relation entre ces forces et dans la prémisse de la suprématie de la totalité sur l’individu. Nous devons chercher cette idée dans toutes les forces de la nature car chacune a sa philosophie, sa signification et un lien avec les autres entités:

Depuis Dieu jusqu’au moindre grain de sable, l’univers africain est un cosmos sans solution de continuité. Chaque force vivante est unie obligatoirement à d’autres forces. . . . Elle s’insère dans une hiérarchie dynamique au sein de laquelle tout est lié. Nous sommes alors plongés dans un univers de correspondances, d’analogies, d’harmonies et d’interactions.⁵⁵

Tandis que la morale occidentale est presque toujours fondée sur les concepts de la rationalité individuelle qui trouvent leur source dans la philosophie cartésienne (“Je pense, donc je suis”), le paradigme “Nous sommes, donc je suis” exprime plus justement le fondement principal de l’éthique africaine en montrant les liens qui unissent les

⁵³ Cette déclaration ne signifie pas qu’Alourdes n’a pas mangé ce jour-là. McCarthy Brown a confié qu’il lui avait fallu plusieurs années pour comprendre ce que cela signifiait. Mama Lola a utilisé cette expression pour signifier qu’elle était déprimée et peinée, montrant ainsi combien l’esprit et le corps sont liés. Elle est triste et son être entier est affecté, comme si elle n’avait pas mangé (alors qu’elle s’est nourrie). Cf. McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 44.

⁵⁴ McCarthy Brown, “Alourdes” (ci-dessus, n. 3), 166.

⁵⁵ P. Erny, *Childhood and Cosmos: The Social Psychology of the Black African Child*, Washington, DC: Black Orpheus Press 1973, 15.

humains les uns aux autres. Ils font partie d'un même réseau humain et chacune de leurs actions influence l'équilibre de l'autre monde. Ils ne sont pas uniquement responsables de leurs actes, ils sont aussi responsables pour les autres et pour le monde autour d'eux. Agir de façon morale leur impose de maintenir l'équilibre des choses, de respecter l'harmonie de la nature et de la *force cosmique universelle*.⁵⁶

Jean Manolesco explique dans *Vaudou et Magie Noire*⁵⁷ comment pendant et après l'initiation, une personne ne fait plus qu'un avec toutes les autres créatures vivantes et avec les quatre éléments, l'air, le feu, l'eau et la terre. C'est alors et seulement alors que l'initié perd à jamais la volonté et le désir d'imposer son ego aux autres. Brown exprime la même idée lorsqu'elle décrit son état psychologique après son initiation:

J'ai nourri les forces intérieures, j'ai reconnu les forces extérieures et j'ai compris qu'elles étaient à la fois semblables et différentes ... et le résultat a été une nouvelle compréhension de ce que signifie être conscient et prêter attention à la toute petite voix que le magnétophone interne ne peut capter. Cette voix parle par impulsions, comme un battement de cœur, mais plus fort, plus profond. Une fois, après mon initiation, j'ai senti cette même pulsation qui sortait de la terre elle-même et qui prenait possession de mon corps.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ce concept est ce que Jaheinz Jahn appelle *Ntu*. Dans son livre, *Muntu: The New African Culture* (New York: Grove Press 1961) il écrit: "... le lieu et le temps sont des forces et les 'modalités' sont des forces. Homme et femme, ..., chien et pierre, ..., beauté et rire sont des forces et sont liées les unes aux autres" (100). Son livre représente l'une des premières tentatives de description de la culture et de la philosophie africaines en tant que telles par un Européen. C'est pour cela qu'il est précieux, même si depuis, beaucoup d'autres choses ont été écrites dans ce domaine. J'utilise la terminologie qu'il emploie pour exprimer des notions fondamentales de l'ethos africain. Je fais référence en particulier à ses concepts de *Ntu*, *Muntu* et *Kuntu*. *Muntu* (un mot bantou traduit souvent par "homme") est une catégorisation qui inclut l'unité entre les vivants et les morts, les ancêtres et les ancêtres déifiés. *Kuntu* est expliqué dans la section sur l'esthétique noire. Voir aussi les travaux de Placide Tempels, par exemple *Bantu Philosophie*, Paris: Présence Africaine 1961.

⁵⁷ J. Manolesco, *Vaudou et Magie Noire*, Montréal: Editions du Jour 1972, 88.

⁵⁸ McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself" (ci-dessus, n. 4), 74–75.

En outre, du concept de globalisme découle l'idée fondamentale que les esprits vodous ne sont pas saints parce qu'ils sont bons mais parce qu'ils embrassent tout, qu'ils sont entiers et complexes et qu'ainsi ils reflètent l'existence humaine. Ils sont entiers et réels et renvoient l'image des conflits de l'existence qui sont des manifestations des désordres du réseau des relations humaines, des contradictions et des signes de déséquilibre. "Il faut alors non pas faire disparaître ce conflit mais le faire agir en faveur de la vie et non contre la vie."⁵⁹

Les esprits quand ils montent leurs *chwal*⁶⁰ (chevaux) pendant les trances de possession n'apparaissent pas toujours comme des êtres justes, sereins, humbles, calmes, dévoués. Ils rassurent mais ils punissent aussi, ils consolent mais ils exigent un soutien, ils donnent mais réclament aussi. Pendant le rituel, ils expliquent certaines choses aux participants: ils leur rappellent et leur montrent ce qu'ils pourraient oublier. Il arrive souvent que les participants comprennent combien les images particulières évoquées par les esprits s'appliquent à leur situation personnelle. Les *lwa* ne font pas intervenir des éléments complètement étrangers, ils aident à trouver un équilibre au milieu d'une multiplicité de vérités. En fait, "L'adepte du Vodou ne se tourne pas vers la religion pour qu'on lui dise ce qu'il doit faire mais plutôt pour qu'on lui dise comment percevoir."⁶¹

Mbiti écrit que "l'essence de la morale africaine est sociale,"⁶² une observation qui s'applique aisément à la religion vodoue. Susciter des dissonances dans les rythmes qui régissent la société, perturber le flot harmonieux des choses, créer la division dans la communauté sont des actes qui représentent une transgression morale dans le Vodou. Parce que ce réseau entre les êtres et les choses est très dense, si une

⁵⁹ McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes" (ci-dessus, n. 3), 166.

⁶⁰ Le *chwal* d'un *lwa* est une personne qui a été possédée par le dieu, quelqu'un dont le *gro bonanj* (ange gardien/esprit/âme) a été remplacé par l'esprit qui l'a monté. La personne possédée est en transe. Elle n'est pas consciente et n'est plus elle-même, mais l'incarnation du *lwa*.

⁶¹ McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes" (ci-dessus, n. 3), 154.

⁶² J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Praeger, 1969, 214.

seule personne agit de façon immorale, c'est le monde entier qui est perturbé et tente de retrouver un état d'harmonie et son rythme propre. Les communautés vodoues ont leurs propres formes de réplique et de punition lorsqu'une mauvaise action ou une offense a été commise contre les règles et les coutumes qui régissent les obligations et les responsabilités envers la collectivité et les entités qui la composent, à savoir les esprits, les ancêtres, les membres de la famille, la société et même la nature. La morale pour ceux qui servent les esprits est un effort constant de maintien de la cohésion sociale, de l'harmonie et de l'équilibre. Ce qui est "juste" dans le Vodou n'est pas le résultat d'un raisonnement abstrait mais dépend de ce qui en fin de compte assurera et perpétuera l'unité au niveau de la communauté.

Esthétique noire: Fluidité / Equilibre / Rythme

Ne pose pas l'argent sur le lit! (Mama Lola)⁶³

On ne peut pas prier seulement pour Ogou. Il est trop chaud. Allume une bougie pour Danbala aussi. Une personne morale . . . est celle qui conserve son équilibre, qui danse en conservant le rythme, au milieu de forces qui l'entraînent chacune dans un sens différent. (Karen McCarthy Brown)⁶⁴

"Ne pose pas l'argent sur le lit!" crie Alourdes à Brown qui, un jour, a vidé le contenu de son sac sur le lit. Mama Lola explique ensuite à l'étudiante étonnée que l'argent et le lit appartiennent à des pôles antithétiques et sont donc des objets en conflit qui peuvent créer des dissonances. Elle rappelle ainsi à Brown que l'argent, tout comme l'*ason*,⁶⁵ est un instrument au pouvoir coercitif, et donc d'immoralité potentielle. C'est pourquoi on ne doit jamais les poser sur le lit, l'endroit où les gens *kouche*, se couchent, "l'endroit où les enfants sont

⁶³ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 69.

⁶⁴ McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes" (ci-dessus, n. 3), 161.

⁶⁵ L'*ason* est un hochet fait de perles qui confère aux *houngan* et aux *manbo* une certaine influence dans le monde des *lwa*. Ils le reçoivent après avoir subi le quatrième et dernier niveau d'initiation qui les installe dans leur rôle de guérisseur, de prêtre ou prêtresse, de dirigeants des communautés vodoues.

créés et nés, l'endroit où la famille commence.”⁶⁶ Les objets du Vodou ne sont pas seulement des choses, ils possèdent une signification qui va au-delà de leur utilité apparente. Il y a une façon de se comporter, des rituels qui mettent en valeur la fonction, le but et l'utilité des objets ou des actes.

En agissant, une personne donne vie à ce sur quoi elle agit. Les objets et les choses, et même les concepts ont une âme et une vie propres qui émanent de l'énergie cosmique qui leur est insufflée lorsqu'on les fait ou qu'on les utilise. Les Haïtiens croient par exemple au pouvoir des carrefours. Le plan horizontal est celui du monde des mortels, le plan vertical est l'axe métaphysique et les deux se croisent. De là vient la signification du carrefour ou *kafu* dans la cosmologie vodoue. Maya Deren écrit: “Le carrefour est le passage vers le monde invisible qui est l'âme du cosmos, la source de la force vivante, la mémoire et la sagesse cosmique.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Le mot *kouche* est le terme le plus couramment utilisé pour décrire l'initiation dans le vodou. *Kouche* en créole signifie s'allonger, dormir, faire l'amour, donner naissance, mourir et ressusciter (dans l'initiation vodoue). Le lit (ou ce qui en tient lieu) doit être respecté pour ce qu'il représente: la vie et la mort, les deux faces d'une même monnaie. Toutefois, ceci peut sembler contradictoire avec l'ancien travail d'Alourdes comme Marie Jacques, une activité qui lui permettait de prendre soin de ses enfants. L'expression “prendre soin” est clé ici. Bien que cette activité soit perçue comme immorale en général, le fait qu'elle permettait à Alourdes de “prendre soin,” de “maintenir la vie” de ses jeunes enfants lui donne un sens différent. Le même raisonnement s'applique dans les sacrifices d'animaux car la vie de l'animal est sacrifiée pour maintenir en vie les esprits et les humains.

⁶⁷ M. Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, New Paltz, NY: McPherson and Co. 1984, 35. Tout comme d'autres concepts vodous, la notion de carrefour est souvent mal interprétée. Kenneth Freed écrit: “L'une des images favorites dans l'existence haïtienne est le *kafu*, le carrefour. . . . Haïti est justement à l'un des carrefours les plus importants de son histoire, mais si le passé permet d'envisager le futur, alors il n'y a pas beaucoup d'espoir, quel que soit le chemin qui sera pris. A ce *kafu*, l'un des panneaux indique la voix de Jean-Bertrand Aristide, un prêtre catholique radical, voire renégat, dont le passé est plein de visions instables et d'actions contradictoires. L'autre route conduit Haïti vers un “Nouveau Duvalierisme,” l'écho d'un mouvement dont le passé est entaché de violence, de corruption et de terreur.” (*Los*

La cosmologie vodoue met l'accent sur l'unité, la conformité, la cohésion du groupe, le soutien apporté à autrui. Là aussi, cette vision du monde est transmise principalement grâce aux cérémonies d'initiation. Si l'on s'en tient à une explication un peu simpliste, être initié, *kouche*, signifie perdre son ancienne personnalité et en acquérir une nouvelle qui prend sa source dans une conscience collective anti-individualiste. Pendant les quelques jours que dure la retraite, la personne doit régresser en enfance — et est donc traitée en conséquence — puis elle est ramenée à un nouvel état adulte à travers des rituels qui lui enseignent à vaincre la peur, la douleur et l'égoïsme. Brown écrit:

Entrer dans cette chambre ressemblait à la mort. Les amis et la famille alignés pleuraient en embrassant les initiés pour leur dire au revoir. La sincérité de leurs larmes me donnèrent à réfléchir. Les tambours martelaient depuis des heures les rythmes Petro, des rythmes rapides, complexes et excitants. . . . Sept fois, j'ai levé la main puis l'obscurité. . . . On m'a poussée pour me déséquilibrer et j'ai dû apprendre à recouvrer mon équilibre. . . . Pendant quelques brefs instants, je suis morte.⁶⁸

Quand les initiés quittent la pièce où ils étaient enfermés, leur tête est couverte. Ils doivent rester ainsi pendant quarante jours après leur initiation.⁶⁹ Il est évident que l'art de l'initiation est un message moral *per se*: les forces de la vie et de la mort sont prises en compte, les limites de la connaissance et du pouvoir sont remises en cause, la vérité et la foi sont revalorisées à travers le processus d'initiation, qui est pour le moins une expérience d'humilité et de fraternité.

Pendant ces cérémonies, les gens expriment les conflits de leur existence, ce que l'on appellerait dans le monde occidental des dilemmes

Angeles Times, 26 octobre 1993, p. H 1). Voici encore un nouvel exemple de banalisation d'un concept religieux complexe par un journal étranger.

⁶⁸ "Plenty Confidence in Myself" (ci-dessus, n. 4), 72–75. Même si personne ne doit révéler les secrets de l'initiation vodoue, Karen McCarthy Brown a été autorisée à décrire ses réactions durant le processus. Elle met en garde le lecteur qui ne doit pas "surinterpréter" son "discours métaphorique."

⁶⁹ Comme le crâne d'un bébé, la nouvelle "tête" de l'initié, symbole de sa nouvelle identité, est considérée comme vulnérable et doit donc être protégée.

moraux. La tâche du dignitaire religieux est d'orchestrer le processus (l'énergie des participants, le choix des chants, le rythme de la musique, l'arrivée des esprits, les rituels de possession) grâce auquel le Vodou traite les dilemmes moraux et explique les choix des participants. Brown écrit:

Une personne morale ... est celle qui *balanse*, qui conserve son équilibre, qui danse en conservant le rythme, au milieu de forces qui l'entraînent chacune dans un sens. Une personne morale est celle qui a développé un sens du rythme, c'est-à-dire un sens aigu de soi. Néanmoins ... aucun rythme, pas même le sien, n'a de sens en-dehors d'une relation avec autrui.⁷⁰

Le pouvoir moral est attribué aux esprits et jamais à la personne possédée, montée par un *lwa*, ni jamais au *houngan* ou à la *manbo*. Dès lors, le défi pour le chef spirituel est d'être assez adroit pour orchestrer la réception de ce message. Ce en quoi Alourdes excelle. Elle dit souvent à propos de ses offices religieux, de son pouvoir et de sa vie en général: "J'ai confiance en moi-même." En tant que prêtresse vodoue accomplie, Mama Lola met en scène de façon remarquable les services vodous et incarne une véritable autorité morale selon la cosmologie haïtienne. Sous sa houlette, l'harmonie et l'équilibre sont retrouvés. Son "style" rituel la classe parmi les techniciens les plus remarquables du monde sacré vodou. Elle "sert" avec style, "afin de diriger." C'est un professeur hors pair. Brown, qui a assisté pendant plusieurs années à ce qu'elle appelle les performances héroïques de Mama Lola, conclut:

Le problème moral n'est pas le mal mais le déséquilibre, que ce soit chez une personne ou entre plusieurs personnes. Dans cet environnement où la vie s'articule autour des conflits, l'autorité morale centrale n'est pas la personne dont l'existence serait le modèle à imiter. C'est plutôt une personne, un technicien subtil et adroit du sacré, qui sait orchestrer les contextes rituels de façon à ce que chacun découvre sa façon de danser en maintenant un équilibre dynamique avec les autres qui dansent chacun à leur manière.⁷¹

⁷⁰ McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes" (ci-dessus, n. 3), 161.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Le Vodou est donc une action délicate de recherche d'équilibre. C'est pourquoi on dit aux néophytes de prier à la fois Ogou et Danbala. Ogou, le guerrier, est trop "chaud." La modération de Danbala est nécessaire pour créer cet équilibre durant le service. La fluidité, le déséquilibre et les contradictions, comme beaucoup d'autres éléments du Vodou, suscitent des questions. Brown demande ainsi: "Pourquoi Gede, dont le caractère est par certains côtés très souple, est-il si attaché à l'idéologie de la domination masculine?"⁷² Cette question est un catalyseur qui permet de s'assurer que les relations, notamment entre hommes et femmes, ne sont ni bipolaires, ni polaires mais toujours dynamiques et situationnelles. Brown écrit: "[nous] . . . attendons avec impatience la naissance de Gedelia qui sortirait du cocon historique et religieux haïtien . . . une Gedelia au caractère entier [qui] serait beaucoup mieux qu'un Gede au féminin."⁷³

Stratégies de guérison et sens pratique

Tu n'as qu'à essayer. Vois si ça marche pour toi. (Mama Lola)⁷⁴

Tous les rituels vodous, qu'ils soient de faible ou de grande importance, qu'ils soient individuels ou collectifs, sont des rites de guérison. (Karen McCarthy Brown)⁷⁵

En plus des aspects dont nous avons déjà discuté, le Vodou haïtien a une composante très terre-à-terre et très utilitariste dont les fondements sont la pauvreté et l'oppression. Brown fait cette remarque: "Il n'est pas exagéré de dire que les Haïtiens en sont arrivés à croire que la vie et la souffrance sont inséparables."⁷⁶ Faisant allusion aux mérites incroyables et à la persévérance du peuple haïtien, elle écrit aussi: "Haïti a résisté miraculeusement aux souffrances de l'histoire en accroissant ses richesses esthétiques et spirituelles."⁷⁷

⁷² McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 380. Gede est l'esprit de la mort et de la sexualité.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

Persuadés que les esprits les aideront dans leur lutte pour la survie, les gens se tournent vers le Vodou pour que leur existence et celles des membres de leurs familles soient meilleures, pour soigner leurs âmes et leurs blessures et trouver l'espérance dans cette vie et après la mort. A l'inverse d'autres religions, le Vodou ne connaît pas les concepts d'Âge d'or, de Paradis ou de Ciel. La vie après la mort pourrait bien être aussi terrible que les conditions de vie terrestre. Dès lors, c'est la survie sur terre qui est la valeur primordiale, survie de la personne et du groupe. La guérison qui prolonge la vie dans le temps est l'un des principes constitutifs du Vodou.

Lors des cérémonies vodoues, les croyants apportent leurs fardeaux, leurs difficultés et leurs chagrins. La fonction morale d'une cérémonie devient évidente quand elle évolue vers un service de guérison collective. "Le drame du Vodou ... ne se produit pas tant dans les rituels eux-mêmes que lorsque ceux-ci sont accomplis en relation avec les existences perturbées des dévots. ... Tous les rituels vodous, qu'ils soient de faible ou de grande importance, qu'ils soient individuels ou collectifs, sont des rites de guérison."⁷⁸ Les liens fondamentaux de la communauté sont donc renforcés par l'expression des problèmes individuels et collectifs. Les malentendus sont éclaircis dans l'interaction avec les esprits; la chance et la protection sont assurées; les traitements médicaux à base d'herbes, la divination, notamment par les cartes, la préparation des talismans sont mis en œuvre comme éléments du culte ancestral. Brown décrit ainsi la gamme des pratiques curatives de Mama Lola: "Elle traite les problèmes de santé mais aussi les difficultés sentimentales, professionnelles, familiales. ... Elle associe les techniques et connaissances d'un médecin, d'un psychothérapeute, d'un assistant social et d'un prêtre."⁷⁹ La guérison pour Alourdes n'est pas seulement une tâche mais de façon plus large, une attitude et une danse avec les esprits.

Dans l'environnement haïtien, même les enfants sont endurcis volontairement afin que, plus tard, ils soient capables de supporter les dé-

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

ceptions et les tromperies de l'existence. "On doit les endurcir," dit Maggie, la fille de Mama Lola, à Brown après un événement qui aurait dérangé plus d'un Occidental. Elle avait promis à un enfant qu'il pourrait accompagner Brown après avoir fini son dîner. Le dîner fini, il s'apprête donc à mettre son manteau pour partir comme on lui avait promis. Au contraire, on lui dit de s'asseoir car Karen "ne l'emmènera certainement pas."⁸⁰ Fausses promesses, changements de plans, mesures autoritaires et abusives sont souvent utilisés dans le monde vodou pour enseigner aux enfants que la vie n'est pas toujours rose et que souvent on n'obtient pas ce qui avait été promis, même si on a travaillé pour l'avoir. Les enfants entendent souvent pendant les rituels les gens chanter le refrain *travaj, travaj* ("travail, oh travail"), une chanson qui glorifie la valeur du travail mais communique aussi la résignation et la tristesse d'un peuple qui n'a pas toujours récolté les fruits de son labeur.

"Tu n'as qu'à essayer. Vois si ça marche pour toi," dit Mama Lola à Brown qui envisageait la possibilité de s'impliquer plus avant dans la religion vodoue. Mama Lola ne lui demande pas si elle croit ou si elle a la foi. Elle lui suggère d'essayer pour voir si cela l'aide à se sortir des difficultés au milieu desquelles elle se débat à ce moment de son existence. Le Vodou n'est pas une religion doctrinale que l'on étudierait de façon systématique; elle est précieuse lorsque son aide est efficace. Comme Brown le comprend plus tard: "Si j'avais apporté moins de moi-même dans le Vodou, ... [j']en aurais sorti moins de choses." Elle confie encore: "Si j'avais persisté à vouloir étudier le Vodou de façon objective, le cœur du système, sa capacité à guérir, serait restée pour moi un mystère."⁸¹ Après son initiation, Mama Lola lui enseigne comment utiliser le pouvoir qu'elle peut exercer en écoutant les esprits: "C'est ton pouvoir. C'est ta *konesans*. Voilà comment ça marche! ... Tu sens que tu ne dois pas faire quelque chose, tu écoutes, tu ne le fais pas. Mais si tu sens que l'esprit te dit de faire

⁸⁰ McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself" (ci-dessus, n. 4), 72.

⁸¹ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 10.

quelque chose . . . par exemple aider quelqu'un . . . alors tu le fais et cette personne s'en félicitera."⁸²

Les préceptes du Vodou mettent en exergue la clairvoyance de la personne, la justesse de son intuition. Ses adeptes utilisent leur jugement pour augmenter leur pouvoir au bénéfice de ceux qui ont besoin d'aide. Comme le montrent les différentes personnifications d'Ogou, il y a aussi une force destructrice potentielle dans le pouvoir: "Le pouvoir libère, il corrompt, il détruit."⁸³ En utilisant le pouvoir de façon négative, on détruit l'harmonie de la société et de la nature. Comme le croit Mama Lola, une personne qui fait du mal à autrui en souffre par la suite. Ceci illustre encore le côté pragmatique de cette religion ancestrale: les actions doivent être tempérées par le souci de se protéger. Alourdes, dont les qualités sont l'empathie et la générosité, est aussi très terre-à-terre quand il s'agit de la survie de sa famille:

Alourdes est une femme forte qui est le principal soutien affectif et financier d'une famille qui se démène. C'est une combattante, une survivante qui a connu des moments difficiles mais que les souffrances n'ont pas aigri. C'est une présence qui doit être prise en compte, quelqu'un qui suscite le respect des autres. Et son amour propre est évident. Alourdes est aussi généreuse, empathique et attentive; elle aime aider les autres. Elle doit maintenir un équilibre entre son désir de porter secours à autrui et l'attention qu'elle doit porter à elle-même.⁸⁴

Comme les *lwa*, Mama Lola n'est pas un exemple moral, elle est entière, avec ses forces et ses faiblesses. Sa versatilité et son caractère capricieux, ses bouderies maussades renforcent son côté humain. Brown écrit à propos des nombreuses fois où elle a cherché à parler à Mama Lola sans succès: "Au début . . . elle n'avait pas l'air particulièrement ravie de me voir. A plusieurs reprises, j'ai dû attendre plusieurs heures pendant qu'elle parlait au téléphone ou qu'elle était avec des clients, avant qu'elle ne me dise enfin qu'elle n'avait pas

⁸² McCarthy Brown, "Plenty Confidence in Myself" (ci-dessus, n. 4), 75.

⁸³ McCarthy Brown, "Alourdes" (ci-dessus, n. 3), 150.

⁸⁴ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 9.

envie de parler ce jour-là.”⁸⁵ Sai Baba, un dignitaire religieux indien, a un tempérament similaire et fait preuve de la même versatilité.⁸⁶ Leur comportement serait-il une autre manifestation de leur mission divine? Essayeraient-ils de reproduire le comportement de “dieux taquins”? Serait-ce parce qu’ils sont dans une autre dimension que la conscience humaine ne peut percevoir? Les choses ne sont jamais simples dans le domaine de la religion.

La réputation de Mama Lola s’étend bien au-delà des limites de la communauté haïtienne. Elle a réalisé des traitements aux Etats-Unis, au Canada et dans plusieurs endroits dans les Caraïbes, en Amérique Centrale et en Afrique. L’impact international de son ministère est très inhabituel même si de nombreux prêtres du Vodou partagent son intérêt pour tous les peuples et toutes les cultures du monde. Un jour que Brown discutait avec Mama Lola et que l’attention de cette dernière s’était un peu affaiblie, elle prit le temps d’examiner la pièce où elle était:

Des étagères chargées de souvenirs donnés par des clients couvraient un pan de mur entier: des cendriers, des poupées, des fleurs en plumes. Sur le mur opposé il y avait des photos en couleur de Maggie et de Johnny, à côté de photos de stars de cinéma et de saints catholiques. Au-dessus de la porte, un talisman vodou protégeait la maison, pendu à côté d’un fer-à-cheval entrelacé avec une croix formée de deux rameaux bénis le dimanche des Rameaux. Dans la pièce pendait le mot LOVE [amour] dont les lettres étaient découpées dans du plastique coloré. Des éléments disparates issus du Vodou et de la foi catholique, des cultures haïtienne et américaine formaient un ensemble esthétique homogène.⁸⁷

Alourdes n’a pas peur d’intégrer des éléments d’autres cultures dans sa vision du monde et de les utiliser dans son travail de guérison. Ce nouvel ethos se manifeste dans plus d’un domaine et les Haïtiens qui vivent à l’étranger doivent s’accoutumer à ce phénomène. Le travail d’Elizabeth McAlister sur les prêtresses vodoues de New York

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁶ L.A. Babb, “Sathya Sai Baba’s Sainly Play,” dans *Saints and Virtues*, éd. J.S. Hawley, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1987, 168–186.

⁸⁷ McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola*, 107.

montre comment les nouveaux rites et pratiques curatives reflètent les conditions de vie de l'Haïtien pauvre et mal informé séjournant dans un pays étranger. Elle explique aussi l'échange culturel complexe qui se produit entre des sociétés disjointes mais liées: "En écoutant ces femmes on s'informe sur la culture urbaine américaine, car dans leur travail, elles font preuve de finesse dans leur critique de cette culture."⁸⁸

Conclusion

Les féministes post-modernes ont rejeté l'idée d'une identité unique et unitaire qui pourrait s'exprimer d'une seule voix. Elles soutiennent l'idée que les voix des femmes sont aussi diverses et variées que les histoires personnelles et les cultures qui ont modelé leurs vies et leurs expériences individuelles.⁸⁹ Des notions comme la polyphonie et les voix multiples ou multidimensionnelles sont utilisées pour refléter des identités féminines complexes, leurs personnalités multiples et distinctes et leurs différents modes d'expression et de communication.⁹⁰ Le travail novateur de Carol Gilligan qui considère que le développement moral et social se manifeste dans l'émergence d'une "voix authentique" qui doit s'exprimer est remis en cause par des notions telles que le silence comme acte mature de résistance et voie du pouvoir.⁹¹ Autre point d'achoppement, déjà évoqué dans cet essai, la notion de dissonance entre les féminismes des pays pauvres et ceux des pays riches.

⁸⁸ E. McAlister, "Sacred Stories from the Haitian Diaspora: A Collective Biography of Seven Vodou Priestesses in New York City," *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 9:1-2 (1993) 10-27.

⁸⁹ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge 1990; C.T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (ci-dessus, n. 12).

⁹⁰ P.J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1991.

⁹¹ C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1982; M.A. Mahoney, "The Problem of Silence in Feminist Psychology," *Feminist Studies* 22:3 (1996), 603-625.

Cet essai se veut une nouvelle contribution à la littérature féministe sur “la voix” et la résistance en ajoutant une nouvelle dimension au débat, celle de la naissance d’une voix unique distincte à partir de l’association de voix multiples, celle du chercheur / de l’observateur / du participant et les multiples voix de l’informateur. Cette notion de voix distinctes qui s’unissent pourrait être un nouveau terrain de recherche scientifique.

Cet essai présente la notion de polyphonie en mettant l’accent sur l’existence d’aspects multidimensionnels dans les voix respectives de Mama Lola et de Karen McCarthy Brown. Il montre aussi que malgré des perspectives individuelles différentes et des niveaux d’expérience influencés par la nationalité, la race, la classe et l’éducation, Brown et Mama Lola ont su trouver un canal de communication commun, une voix commune, pour informer leurs lecteurs et l’assistance nombreuse qui vient les écouter lors des conférences. Cette *voix* fusionnée et combinée est plus forte et plus savante que les voix individuelles et séparées qui la constituent. Cette nouvelle voix est sage et forte, elle parle avec expérience mais aussi avec le cœur, en associant une perspective scientifique et la vision d’un initié, qui, si l’on reprend le modèle de Marshall, parle à la fois pour l’unité individuelle, ici le duo Mama Lola-Brown, et pour la communauté, ici les adeptes du Vodou, qu’ils fassent partie de cette famille ou d’une autre. Cette voix est harmonieuse et équilibre les choses; elle comprend la sagesse transmise par les ancêtres et les *lwa* et sait comment la transmettre à son tour. Cet essai montre que cette voix unique et harmonieuse existe, même si les deux femmes s’expriment chacune à leur tour: c’est *la* voix de Mama Lola et de Brown.

Cette voix rend justice au Vodou et aux personnes qui servent les *lwa*. Brown et Mama Lola nous montrent comment elles servent, chacune à sa façon mais avec l’objectif de demeurer des ambassadrices fidèles de la religion et de la communauté. Brown écrit ainsi: “Nous espérons toutes deux que notre tentative servira à corriger l’image déformée de cette religion ancestrale.”⁹² Leurs vies et leur travail

⁹² McCarthy Brown, “Writing about the ‘Other’ ” (ci-dessus, n. 10), A56.

montrent comment la religion haïtienne rend les femmes puissantes, la *manbo* étant une manifestation unique du pouvoir des femmes haïtiennes. De plus, la réussite de ces deux femmes et de cette voix qui leur est commune nous présente une morale haïtienne authentique, celle d'une démocratie spirituelle qui est le génie du Vodou.

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THE SATANIC RITUAL ABUSE PANIC AS RELIGIOUS-STUDIES DATA

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Summary

Rumors and alleged memories of Satanic cult activity swept through the U.S. and U.K. during the 1980s and 1990s, confounding scholars of religion, as well as jurists and psychologists, with their combination of tantalizing ritual scenes and dubious forensic evidence. This essay discusses the work done on these Satanic cult claims since the early 1990s in a variety of academic fields; and it critiques some of the scholarly responses from the field of Religious Studies in particular.

From the 1980s through the 1990s panic spread through the United States and United Kingdom about widespread Satanic cults, engaging in sexual abuse, infant sacrifice, perverse ceremonies, and mind-control. The cults—I use the term in its mythically negative rather than scientific sense—were believed to be well-organized, intergenerational, permeating police forces and government, and dedicated only to the promulgation of evil. Those who saw themselves in the front line of combat against these insidious groups were psychotherapists and child-welfare advocates, standing alone in their convictions in the credibility of the “victims” while receiving—they claimed—bizarre threats from the cults. Out of this vanguard of cult-abuse professionals arose a new diagnostic/criminological category: “Satanic Ritual Abuse” (hereafter: SRA) (Sakheim and Devine 1992; Sinason 1994; Rose 1996; Noblitt and Perskin 2000; *ra-info* 2002). By the mid-1990s, the number of people accused (and often convicted) of SRA—daycare workers and parents, mostly in America and England—numbered in the hundreds.

The subject of Satanic cults, rituals of evil, and blood sacrifices should invite the interest of students and historians of religion. However, the encounter of such a diverse discipline as Religious Studies with the *kinds of data* that the panics offered has led to widely diver-

gent approaches. Despite the prominent, if demographically negligible, “churches” of Satan and Aleister Crowley and the diverse youthful expressions of “Satanic” or “Goth” counterculture (Ellis 1990; Victor 1993:133–54; La Fontaine 1999:86–114; Medway 2001:9–33), the evidence for the abusive Satanic cults consisted almost entirely of “memories”: those extracted from small children by anxious adults, those “recovered” from adults during psychotherapy, using hypnosis and/or a protocol of unquestioning belief on the therapist’s part, and those publicly offered by people “born again” — saved from Satan.

Memories make for complex evidence of religious *realia*, as any reader of Paul of Tarsus and Epiphanius of Salamis will know, and especially if they are produced under such fraught circumstances. How, then, have scholars of religion approached this evidence? Some took the rumors, testimonies, and “recovered memories” as the material of ever-new sorts of secret religion (Kent 1993) or of a continuing, even prehistoric underworld devoted to evil (Raschke 1990; cf. Hill and Goodwin 1991, DeMause 1994). For others, the SRA panics represented cultural phenomena akin to European and African witch-finding movements, the rumors that swirled around ancient Christians or early modern Jews, the anxieties about Catholics and Mormons in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, or even the claims of UFO-abduction, the latter which likewise involved procedures for “recovering memories” (La Fontaine 1992; Mulhern 1993; Frankfurter 1994; Bromley 1994a).

Religious-studies approaches to the SRA panics and their claims of widespread, intergenerational Satanic cults should, of course, depend primarily on the nature and veracity of the evidence rather on the *presumed likelihood* of the rituals’ or cults’ existence. For this reason it is important to realize that actual, historically tenable forensic evidence for the alleged Satanic cults and the crimes has *not* yet appeared, a fact that many law-enforcement experts, psychologists, sociologists, and journalists noted already in 1991 (Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991; Lanning 1991; cf. Goodman, Qin, Bottoms, and Shaver 1994; La Fontaine 1998). Since the bulk of claims for this sort of cult have been based on protracted and forceful interviews with very young chil-

dren and on the results of therapy with adults, in most cases designed to recover memories specifically of SRA, scholars researching Satanic cults must acquaint themselves with the severe criticisms these interviews and therapies have undergone in the field of psychology. Human memory, psychologists have shown, is clearly not a matter of historical snapshots, even in cases of trauma, and it is enormously subject to suggestion, fantasy, social conditions, and cultural influences (e.g., Ganaway 1989; Ceci and Bruck 1993; Loftus 1993; Coons 1994; DeYoung 1994; Spanos, Burgess, and Burgess 1994; Pressley and Grossman 1994; Ofshe and Watters 1994; Pope 1996; Bottoms, Shaver, and Goodman 1996; De Rivera and Sarbin 1998; cf. Mulhern 1994; Nathan and Snedeker 1995; Haaken 1998; La Fontaine 1998). Those individuals who have claimed publicly to have been high priests and priestesses in elaborate Satanic cults have often made these claims in the context of fundamentalist Christian conversion narratives, in which the elaboration and repudiation of one's past sins substantiates one's present evangelical authority (cf. Harding 1987; Shupe and Bromley 1981) — and in some prominent cases the claims to prior Satanic crimes have been proven false (Ellis 2000:160–201; Medway 2001).

One of the most interesting details in the now-abundant research on SRA claims has been the types of cultural interpenetration (or “contamination”) that evidently influenced the patients’ “memories” and the therapists’ or interviewers’ theories of cult activity. Journalists and social scientists have shown direct influences, both on “victims’” testimonies and on the wider panics, of such widely promulgated books as *Michelle Remembers* (Smith and Padzer 1980), written by a “victim” and her therapist about the Satanic conspiracy they progressively unveiled; of television shows like Geraldo Rivera’s “Devil Worship: Exploring Satan’s Underground” (10/1988), which ranged widely across allegations of “Satanic” crime; and of professional symposiums where “experts” from both psychotherapy and law-enforcement fields could compare theories about the roots of Satanism, the nature and extent of the cults, and the confirmatory details one should seek from children and adult “victims” (Victor 1993; Nathan and Snedeker 1995; Robinson 2000; Dyrendal 2000; Medway 2001). Thus from as far back as

the early 1980s ostensibly independent cases of SRA memories and children's testimonies in fact participated in a range of mutual influences, from popular media to the activities and charisma of travelling experts. Some sources of the panics' ideologies, such as the culture of evangelical exorcism and fears of global Satanic conspiracy, go back even further in the twentieth century (see Bromley 1991; Passantino and Passantino 1992; Ellis 2000:1–16).

Americans and Britons, who saw the most extreme effects of these rumors in the early 1990s, have now filled a bookshelf of excellent studies on the SRA panic, its history, cultural context, and prosecutory excesses (e.g., Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991; Victor 1993; Nathan and Snedeker 1995; La Fontaine 1998; Ellis 2000; Medway 2001). Television documentaries like Ofra Bikel's *Frontline* series (1993, 1995) offered micro-studies of particular Satanic abuse cases and their underlying social dynamics. Overall, the SRA panic has provided an opportunity for scholars to discuss the *conceptualization*—rather than the reified existence—of “evil” in contemporary society (Stevens 1991; Delbanco 1995; Stroup 1996) as well as the social contexts of discourse about evil (La Fontaine 1992; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). For example, as notions of Satanism moved out of evangelical Christian circles to the secular “survivor” groups of the 1980s, the *motivations imputed* to the alleged Satanic cults shifted from worship of an arch-demonic force to mind-control and abuse for their own sake (cf. Friesen 1992; Gould 1995; Noblitt and Perskin 2000). Cults, one might paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, are “good to think with” when people are anxious about cultural decline, subversion, and evil (Lévi-Strauss 1963:89; see Bromley 1994b).

These bibliographies constitute essential reading for the study of Satanic cults *as an idea*, even before one begins to analyze their putative activities. Unfortunately, many scholars in Religious Studies have had a certain aversion to the positivistic use of evidence, borne of post-modern critiques of scientific verifiability and a general relativism toward truth-claims. This aversion has made it difficult for such scholars to weigh their own broad assumptions about religion and religious behavior against, in this case, a significant lack of forensic evidence. Re-

ligious Studies has also been plagued by an enthusiasm for imagining religious subcultures that “must have” been there: orgiastic Gnostic cults in antiquity, diabolical witch-cults for the late medieval period, and even — among turn-of-the-century Russian scholars — Jews sacrificing Christian children (see Strack 1909:vii–xvi). I have elsewhere suggested that this scholarly readiness to believe in orgiastic, infanticidal Satanic cults, and the credibility Religious Studies has often lent to theories of Satanic activity, derives from the field’s uncritical perpetuation of notions of antinomian *ritual* that go back to the nineteenth century, preserved in the works of Robertson Smith, Freud, Scholem, Girard, Burkert, and others (Frankfurter 2001). As these models of ritual once informed western understandings of “primitive” religion on the cultural or historical *periphery*, so they have often (as now) been turned *inward*, to construe in religious terms the fear of subversive evil *among us*.

It is important for scholars and historians of religions to take seriously Evans Pritchard’s critique of “If I were a horse” scholarship, in which one insists that people “must have” thought in such a way, or performed such-and-such a ritual, or performed the imagined ritual for such-and-such a reason, or that there “must be” such-and-such a cult, simply because such thinking (or ritualizing) “makes sense” (Evans Pritchard 1965:24, 43, 47). We must realize the extent to which our imaginations inform our reconstructions of ancient and marginal religions. And given the continuing publication of books like *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology, and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America* (re-issued in 2000) along with uncritical reviews in professional journals (Schmuttermaier 2001; Herrmann-Pfandt 2002), scholars of religion might look again at their methods and assumptions in approaching controversial data.

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BOOK REVIEWS

KATHARINA WALDNER, *Geburt und Hochzeit des Kriegers. Geschlechterdifferenz und Initiation in Mythos und Ritual der griechischen Polis* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, 46) — Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2000 (IX + 281 p.) ISBN 3-11-016641-0 (cloth) EUR 74.00.

Science of religion lives on detailed studies of religious practice in a specific time and place. We cannot do this historical research without using notions or models elucidating the sources. These conceptions are also indispensable if we want to communicate our insights to colleagues studying religion in another cultural context. Like in any sort of handicraft such instruments have to be inspected, sharpened, and sorted out from time to time. So Katharina Waldner's work about "Birth and marriage of the warrior. Gender difference and initiation in myth and ritual of the Greek polis" has two objectives: W. carefully examines many sources dealing with gender roles and socialisation processes. At the same time she investigates the applicability of the initiation paradigm used by other scholars to explain the structures of the examples dealt with. Her legitimate critique of too careless a use of the conceptual tool leads her to break it and throw it away. Just here lies the problem some readers will have with this very intelligent, thoroughly worked, and well written book: If we are no longer allowed to use the notion "initiation" like a chisel for shaping or like a lens for focussing the material, it gets difficult for us to compare the mass of details to other findings and to arrive at more general theoretical conclusions. Even specialists for ancient Greek religion will then rather see fragments than imagine structures. This extremely de(con)structive critique seems to the reviewer wholly unnecessary, even if one takes into account the objectives as set forth by the author herself: In the tradition of hellenists and historians integrating sociological and anthropological research, well reflected in the first chapter, W. analyses different myths and rituals of the Greek polis, which all could be read (but in her opinion should not) as initiation dramas: the transformation of the female Kainis into the male Kaineus, the hero's Achilles travesty, the Athenian festival "Oschophoria" in which two boys disguised as

girls took part, related myths of Theseus, and finally the Cretan festival called "Ekdysia," that is "taking off" of garments.

In her careful examination of the sources W. discusses several topics taken by other scholars as hints at an initiatory context, for example change of sex, gifts or change of garments. Rejecting this view, she focusses mainly on the problems of gender roles, the differentiation and cooperation of the two sexes. Doing so, W. comes in many details to insights which lead to a better understanding of that "manifold mythic and ritual system by which youths of both sexes were integrated in the society of the polis" (p. 3) — a process the reviewer would call initiation.

For that reason W.'s book is important to read not only for specialists interested in the different subjects, and for theorists distrusting general notions, but also and perhaps foremost for those inquiring into initiation practices in the Mediterranean area of antiquity or in other cultures. They get incited to pay more attention to gender roles than they did before and, above all, to keep their conceptual tools sharp and their focussing lenses clear.

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DOROTHEA BAUDY

HENRI-PAUL FRANCFORT and ROBERTE N. HAMAYON (eds.), in collaboration with Paul G. Bahn, *The Concept of Shamanism: Uses and Abuses* (Bibliotheca Shamanistica 10) — Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 2001 (vii, 408 p.) ISBN 963-05-7866-2 (hb.).

Shamanism is one of the most controversially debated themes in recent anthropology and religious studies, and this for two reasons. First, those cultures that "traditionally" practiced shamanism — mainly of Eurasian provenance — have undergone a deep-reaching transformation during the past 100 years; either they simply disappeared due to colonial extinction, industrialization, or pollution of their lands, or they adapted themselves to this new situation and tried to make their living in a globalized world of capitalism. Secondly, in the last three decades "traditional" shamanism has been adopted and practiced by many people from the United States and Europe; former anthropologists — C. Castaneda, M. Harner, J. Halifax and others — popularized ethnographic knowledge and established a "neo-shamanic" movement that

met the demands of westerners, seeking for the healing capacities of the human soul and a better relationship to the powers of nature.

Both developments are closely connected, or, as may be argued in a deeper analysis, mutually dependent. Both are indications of shamanism in the modern world. The volume under review intends to confront the difficulties for an academic study of shamanism that emerge from these changes. In two sections the book “brings together studies dedicated to two extreme historical contexts where something shamanic has been pointed to” (Hamayon in her introduction on p. 6), namely the talk of a “universal shamanism,” which some scholars want to derive from prehistoric rock art, and the new appreciation of shamanism in modernizing societies.

As far as the first section is concerned (p. 31–294), all contributors share a position that is critical of the thesis that archeological findings may be interpreted as shamanic and that there exists something like a “general shamanic ability” of humankind (this thesis is related to the archeologists David Lewis-Williams and Jean Clottes in particular). The eleven papers, though approaching their issue from quite different areas, persuasively show the difficulties of this theory. In so doing, they want to be “a refreshing antidote to a regrettable phenomenon [. . .], i.e. the uncritical and unfounded presentation of ‘shamanism’ as a key to understanding prehistoric rock art” (Paul G. Bahn on p. 51).

While the first section makes a coherent and strong point, the articles of the second part (p. 297–387) are of a very mixed quality. Under a wide umbrella of “shamanism in modernizing societies” case studies from Tuva, Mexico, Korea, Japan, and North America are presented to show the transformation of shamanic cultures under the pressure of modernization. In her paper “Shamanism and Neoshamanism: What Is the Difference?,” Ulla Johansen compares older ethnographic material with her own field research in Tuva; this results in a list of differences between traditional and “neo”-shamanism, which are trivial and artificial. Her disgust of “neoshamanism” very clearly shows: “Neoshamans, who imitate the classical costume, perform for people they do not know. [. . .] They perform in the daytime, when it is easy to make photos and films” (p. 301); they perform their show “amidst a crowd of tourists and not-too-critical anthropologists,” “showing a carefully arranged scene” and “shamanizing in a ten-minute performance,” decorated with “little shining balls from Christmas-tree decorations [. . .] and green snakes made by the plastic industry” (p. 299–300). A similar polemic, along

with a strong moralistic tone, is present in Danièle Vazeilles' unsystematic paper on Lakota Sioux religion and the "New Age" (without any hint to academic research into "New Age" religion). These approaches do not help clarifying the issue; they are simple attempts to save an anthropological clarity of the "you" and the "me" that has long vanished. And it carries out the title's overconfident presupposition that there is "a" concept of shamanism (singular), and differing uses are "abuses."

That anthropology has more to say about this is exemplified by Magali Demanget in her brilliant essay "Reconstruction of the Shamanic Space and Mystical Tourism in the Mazatec Region (Mexico)." Instead of deciding where (real) "shamanism" and (imitating, colonial) "neo-shamanism" differ, she pictures "how problematic the demarcation between the two can sometimes be. In effect, the point is not so much to establish a typology of the two spheres with respect to worldviews, as to set out the dynamics that are at work in what is a multicultural society" (p. 306). Consequently, modern shamanism should be addressed with a discursive model that integrates academic theorizing, the invention of tradition, the dynamics of contact, and the rhetoric of purity. With this instrument it can be explained why "the Mazatecs, by integrating 'mystical tourism' into the originally secret space of shamanism, are reinforcing community cohesiveness; and this, despite the socio-cultural discontinuity this integration has caused" (p. 312).

Things are much more complex than simple demarcations want to have it. While the first section of *The Concept of Shamanism* clearly scrutinizes the problems involved and can be recommended for anyone interested in prehistoric rock art and shamanism, the second section would have needed more self-critical and careful analysis in the way Demanget has demonstrated.

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Book Reviews

Books

(Listing in this section does not preclude subsequent reviewing)

Baumgarten, Albert I. (ed.), *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*. NUMEN Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions, 93 — Leiden, Boston, Köln, E.J. Brill, 2002, 329 p., \$105.00, ISBN 90-04-12483-7 (hb.).

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- 95 — Leiden, Boston, Köln, E.J. Brill, 2002, 397 p., \$113.00, ISBN 90-04-11665-6 (hb.).
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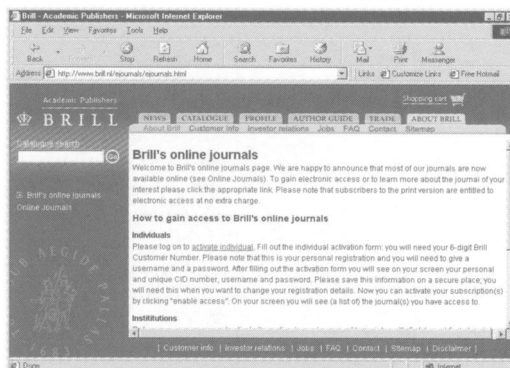
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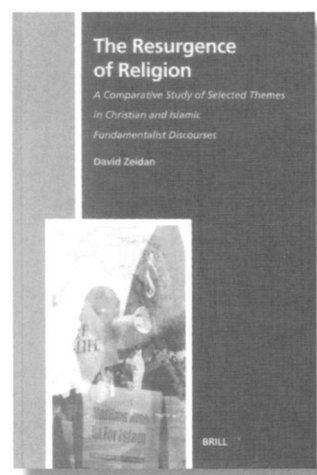
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NVVMEN

*International
Review for the History
of Religions*

VOL. L NO. 2 2003

N⁵o

ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE

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BRILL

NVMEN

PUBLISHER: Brill Academic Publishers
PUBLISHED: Four times a year: January, April, July and October.
SUBSCRIPTION: The subscription price of volume 50 (2003) is EUR 169.- / US\$ 196.- for institutions and EUR 88.- / US\$ 102.- for individuals, *inclusive of postage and handling charges*. All prices are exclusive of VAT in EU-countries (VAT not applicable outside the EU). Price includes online subscription.

Subscription orders are accepted for complete volumes only. Orders take effect with the first issue of any year. Orders may also be entered on an automatic continuing basis. Cancellations will only be accepted if they are received before October 1st of the year preceding the year in which the cancellation is to take effect. Claims for missing issues will be met, free of charge, if made within three months of dispatch for European customers and five months for customers outside Europe.

Subscription orders may be made via any bookseller or subscription agency, or direct to the publisher.

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	Brill Academic Publishers	Brill Academic Publishers Inc.
	P.O. Box 9000	112 Water Street, Suite 400
	2300 PA Leiden	Boston, MA 02109
	Tel: +31 71 535 35 66	Tel: (617) 263 2323
	Fax: +31 71 531 75 32	Fax: (617) 263 2324
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BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON

ISSN 0029-5973 (*print version*); 1568-5276 (*online version*)
Printed in The Netherlands Printed on acid-free paper

NVMEN

Numen is edited on behalf of the International Association for the
History of Religions by Einar Thomassen and Michel Despland

Volume L, 2

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Religion Index One: Periodicals, *Religion Index Two: Multi-Author Works*, *Religious
& Theological Abstracts*, *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, and the
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GUESTHOOD AS ETHICAL DECOLONISING RESEARCH METHOD

GRAHAM HARVEY

Summary

Debates about research methods have often been concerned with the situation of the researcher in relation to those they research among, about or “on.” Reiterating the dualisms embedded in Western culture, many of these have privileged allegedly objective distance between researcher and researched, and worried about researchers “going native.” This paper argues that researchers are always more than these dualities suggest, and that an acceptance and outworking of an alternative relational position would greatly enhance research and its outcomes. That alternative position is explored in dialogue with the protocols by which Maori convert strangers into guests, while allowing the possibility that strangers might be enemies. Similar protocols and relationships are available among other indigenous people, and more widely. Ethical and decolonising research might find rich resources for resolving some typically Western problems in the enhancement of dialogues and relationships that, reflection suggests, underpin the research experiences of many people (researchers and researched included). The paper argues that benefits will accrue not only to academic communities but also to those with whom they engage.

Introduction

Even in the earliest sessions with first-year undergraduate students it is common to discuss the academic benefits and problems of being an “insider” or an “outsider” to the religious communities or ideologies that we study. Do you have to be *x* to understand *x*? Does an observer see *y* better than a participant or “believer” in *y*? With post-graduate students beginning research beyond the confines of academic libraries, going out to meet real people, the issues are more acute. We offer them training in research methods, often privileging participant observation over mere (“insider”) participation and over distant observation. Research careers are often threatened because someone perceives that a researcher may have “gone native” and books

can be dismissed as “reductionist.” All these are, of course, aspects of larger debates about the possibility, necessity and even nature of objectivity. There are very good reasons why we have, and should continue to have, these discussions and concerns. Even if few of us continue to assert the possibility or plausibility of the absolute kind of objectivity our Victorian scholarly ancestors imagined or claimed, we still identify “academic” work as distinguishable from other kinds of activity and discourse by its “critical distance.” Weber (1958) already problematised “objectivity” as referring to two very different kinds of discourse: on the one hand were positivist claims to be able to state the absolute or scientific truth of matters even if this conflicted with experiential knowledge, on the other was “public discourse” taking subjects’ views seriously but speaking to a wider audience. Positivism now seems less defensible, and ethnological disciplines are increasingly committed to taking sources seriously. Subjectivity, however, remains contestable — indeed some forms of reductionism or scepticism may mask objectivity gone too far and validating a different, alienated, kind of subjectivity. In the following discussion, “objectivity” refers to the positivist, distant kind rather than the public discourse that appears legitimately central to academia. (For more detailed examples of these and related debates see McCutcheon 1999.)

This article aims to contribute to a particular aspect of discussions about methods, positions, situatedness and approaches. It is not intended to negate what most of us value about academia. It intersects with the challenges proffered by anti-colonial or decolonising projects, and it arises from the celebration of particular dialogical and experiential encounters. In particular, it is generated by a concern that our methods, approaches and outcomes are not only appropriately academic but are also both ethical and decolonising in the experience of those among or with whom we research. My argument is that academics could benefit considerably from considering Maori protocols in which strangers are turned, by careful stages, into guests rather than enemies, and should thereafter enact and perform their part of that complex relational role with integrity and respect.

Before offering some positive thoughts about such ethical and decolonising research relationships, it may be worth indicating some of the roots of this concern. That is, in the following section I briefly summarise the work of other academics who have made it very clear that the “researched” (or “objects of research”) have concerns about the foundations, conduct, discourse and outcomes of academic research that require a response in both methodological and ethical terms. These are not mere background to my proposal. Although my argument follows largely from insights gained in becoming and enacting guesthood among particular indigenous people, Maori, the challenge of considering ethical and decolonising research methods is by no means limited to dialogue with such people. There are other particular, local, but not always necessarily systematised or even fully conscious, versions of expectations about host-guest (and local-stranger) relationships. Further discussion of guesthood protocols as research methods might consider, for example, discussions of Aboriginal Australia (e.g. Jackson 1995; Turner 1997), Native North America (e.g. Mills 1994; Buckley 2000; Grim 2000), Native South America (e.g. Chernela 2001), Africa (Weiss 1996; Kuipers 1991). I imagine that this list could be greatly extended — certainly, the particular community and focus of other researchers’ projects should indicate the parameters within which further consideration and application of these suggestions might take place.

Challenging Research

Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s powerful book, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), convincingly demonstrates the inextricable link between colonisation and research. Local knowledges, especially indigenous ones, have been the object of research that has rarely either respected or benefited the “donors.” Some indication that such “donation” has not always been either willing or reciprocated may arise from consideration of academic uses of words like “primitive,” “superstition,” “syncretism,” and “savage.” Researchers have appropriated from people whilst being party to their subjection to a culture that diminishes them. Academics have built and sustained careers by theorising about

humanity in ways that have made use and/or mockery of their hosts and sources. When some researchers leave “the field” to return to studies, libraries and lecture theatres, they act as if they had no responsibilities to such hosts. Smith demonstrates that it is possible to engage in research *with* people rather than merely *on*, or even *against*, them. She discusses various possible advances, including the seemingly obvious attempt to understand what the hosts might want researched, and how they might best benefit from such research. Will the knowledge of the hosts be extended or enhanced in ways that arise from indigenous discourse and needs (as determined by the hosts and/or in negotiation)? Will indigenous perspectives be allowed to challenge Western, modernist, colonial or other existing academic knowledges, powers and positions? In short, will indigenous research methods and ethics be applied and brought into dialogue with existing academic approaches?

While Jace Weaver (1998) lays some serious charges of complicity with Western hegemony at the door of postcolonial theory, he also attempts to retrieve something of value from its challenges. Alongside attention to the autonomy and sovereignty of researched communities, Weaver challenges the “universalization” of local knowledges, including their appropriation as knowledge about all indigenes or their reification as global facts. However, he makes this argument far more complex by countering the seemingly concomitant atomisation of local knowledges into incommensurable paradigms. Significantly for the current argument, he does this by contesting the “binary oppositions” of “us” versus “them” (citing Hall 1996). In dialogue with Weaver’s discussion, Dale Stover (2001) further argues that there is a “close fit” between postcolonial interpretation and the everyday experience of contemporary indigenous communities, in this case the Wakpamni Lake community on Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, USA. He also concludes that once taken seriously, indigenous knowledge requires the reconstruction of postcolonial scholarly discourses that “disarm and displace the former distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ and moves towards establishing what Greg Sarris describes as collaborative discourse” (citing Sarris 1993). Thus, Weaver and Stover agree that one significant result of both indigenous and postcolonial approaches

is the questioning of the role (and perhaps nature) of the researcher and their relational situation. To anticipate a later argument, it is not that researchers must learn to relate to their hosts, it is that they should realise that they are already relating, but not very well, and that something can be done about that.

So far my examples have been drawn from scholarly relationships with indigenous people. The issue is, however, relevant to researchers among any and all communities and to all who host researchers (or perhaps “are subjects of research”). For example, the regularity with which researchers among Pagans (self-identified nature-centred religionists now of growing numerical significance internationally) are challenged about whether they have “gone native” is rather disappointing as a reaction to both Pagans and researchers. It may be true that this is just one aspect of a wider concern about scholarship among “new religions” in which researchers enter a conflictual domain which seems to force them into being either advocates or opponents. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi (2001) offers a powerful critique of academic “collaborators” with some such movements. However, academics (supervisory teams and ethics committees in particular) certainly seem more concerned for such researchers than for Christians studying Christianity, Jews studying Judaism, or Buddhists studying Buddhism. This might be an unfair criticism: Religious Studies as a discipline has regularly doubted that Theology is an entirely academic subject because Christians studying Christianity are suspected of deliberately (re-)constructing the religion they claim to study. At any rate, in fact, scholars of Paganism have been at the forefront of consideration of the position of researchers among their host communities. On the one hand, for example, Pagans have been avid readers of academic books about Paganism, often (but not always) because the researchers have made sure their publications are available to their hosts. The history of the Pagan revival is the history of popular reading and application of academic texts (even if this sometimes happens after a particular theory has been rejected in the academy). On the other hand, researchers of Paganism (whether they are or are not Pagan) have been necessarily involved in debates about reflexivity, reactivity, insiders/outsidiers, objectivity/subjectivity and so

on. The high value put on pluralism and diversity within Paganism has tended to diminish the scholarly temptation to collaborate in the construction of a “better” version of the religion and permitted a considerable degree of critical dialogue between researchers and researched. This is not to say that all academic writing about Paganism offers excellent models for other researchers or authors: there are well-known examples of both reductionism and advocacy in writing about Paganism. The point is, however, that research among Pagans has typically been dialogical.

Despite the polemics of Religious Studies scholarship, some theologians too have been concerned with the presence and absence of various voices within the debates that construct Christian theology. Liberation Theologians insist on the prioritisation of the experiences of the poor. Feminist Theologians begin with the experiences of women. Womanist Theology begins with the experiences of black women. The voices of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people are heard in gay, lesbian and bi-sexual theologies. Queer Theology, in particular, has been concerned with the position not only of host communities but also of the researcher in relation to both them and other scholars. That is, “queer” refers not principally to essentialised sexual identities, roles or performances, but with the anomalous position both of particular, usually marginalised and/or demonised, communities and of researchers in relation to them and to the academy. (A variety of other academic disciplines are also being “queered” in similar ways.) However, even less contested theological approaches are relevant here. By engaging with the voices of “ordinary” Christians, Practical Theology has immersed itself in consideration of the relational and power-political nature of theological research, writing, lecturing and preaching. Sometimes these various styles of theology cross-fertilise one another. Thus, in order to research the “reconnection of desire and immortality in the shadow of AIDS,” David Sollis (2002) adapts Melanie Shelton Morrison’s (1998) model of Practical Theology, itself an adaption of Riet Bons-Storm’s (1984) approach. His title, *Queering Death*, resonates both with experiences of those he researched among and with these evolving theological approaches. In parallel with my own re-

flections arising from encounters with indigenous peoples, Sollis situates himself as visitor who seeks to be a guest among men living with AIDS.

A comment near the end of T. Minh-Ha Trinh's (1989) trenchant criticisms of some (dominant) ways of doing anthropology (or being anthropologists) may be seen in a fresh light following consideration of *marae* protocols. She writes:

The other is never to be known unless one arrives at a suspension of language, where the reign of codes yields to a state of constant non-knowledge, always understanding that in the Buddha's country (Buddha being, as some have defined, a clarity or an open space), one arrives without having taken a single step; unless one realizes what in Zen is called the Mind Seal or the continuous reality of awakening, which can neither be acquired nor lost; unless one understands the necessity of a practice of language which remains, through its signifying operations, a process constantly unsettling the identity of meaning and speaking/writing subject, a process never allowing I to fare without non-I.

Perhaps, however, taking a step into an open space *when invited* — and then in order to follow protocols established and conducted by sovereign hosts (hosts whose sovereignty one respects and wishes to enhance) — is different to that project which attempts to write (down or up) the “native” while fearing “going native.” Perhaps it is the first step in learning the language of mutuality that Trinh's critique requires.

Although I will say no more about it, it is important to note that it is not only and always researchers who make research relationships difficult (but see Metcalf 2002). The present proposal to engage as guests is no more straightforward than the more common encouragement to engage in respectful dialogue when researchers encounter communities whose own ontology only recognises insiders and outsiders. Those for whom outsiders can only be “potential converts” or “wicked rejecters” can be particularly difficult and interesting. Quite how it might be possible to find a way to relate even to such hosts as guests is a task that may require considerable effort, but may still prove immensely rewarding.

Ancestors, Neighbours and Descendants

It should already be clear that I enter this debate as something of a latecomer, but I hope it is also clear that I have no pretension that I could possibly untangle all the knots and then present a definitive solution to all the problems and possibilities. Attempting to contribute to a debate is what academia is about. Since it is but one mode of human discourse, academic debate is best achieved with reference to what has been said by a wider community inclusive of our ancestors, neighbours (some of whom are kin and some are potential hosts of our further research), and those yet to speak.

The ancestors of the current debate include a myriad authorities, some of whom are cited above, and many more of whom will be obvious. Many are either foundational or contributors to Young and Goulet (1994) and Spickard, Landres and McGuire (2002). (Perhaps I should note that among many indigenous communities “ancestors” is not synonymous with “dead,” at least, being dead is neither generative or interesting. “Ancestors” refers to greatly respected authorities.) Among those whose research engages with elements of *Maoritanga*, Maori culture, I am most grateful to Marshall Sahlins (1997) who offers a more careful reading of Tamati Ranapiri’s discourse on *hau* than Marcel Mauss’s otherwise deservedly famous discussion of “gift,” and Peter Mataira (2000) who offers considerable clarity about Maori understandings of *mana* and *tapu* (taboo).

The primary inspiration and provocation of this argument arose within my continuing experience of trying to learn to be a respectful guest, *manuhiri*, among members of Ngati Porou (on Aotearoa New Zealand’s east coast) and Ngati Ranana (in and around London, UK). Engagement with the latter group, a diaspora or translocative community, has alerted me to the powerful convergence of the possibilities of “guesthood” with Thomas Tweed’s (2002) argument that “scholars, like Transnational migrants, are constantly moving *across*.” Although his title suggests a discussion of “the Interpreter’s Position” it makes a considerable difference to recognise that such positions change and, especially, that they are relational. I should note, too, that in both Ngati

Porou and Ngati Ranana gender does not determine rights to speak on the *marae* as it does among some other Maori groups. Similarly, the latter group self-consciously (but not without occasional contest) engages in deliberate expansion of traditional protocols for new situations. But, as the following discussion should make clear, it is of the essence of Maori culture to evolve in dialogue with new situations and possibilities. However, I acknowledge that my experience of guesthood may have been different in encounter with more conservative contexts (see Bloch 1975).

Those yet to speak will include those who refine and/or reject the current proposal in favour of something more just, more ethical, more deconstructive of colonialism, and more constructive of better ways of being human together.

Marae Protocols

This section highlights key features of the protocols by which Maori provide the opportunity for strangers to express one or other side of their potential to be enemies or guests. It is important to the argument of this article that these protocols, and the constructed environment in which they occur, evolved significantly consequent to the arrival of Europeans in Aotearoa New Zealand. The protocols and their enactment are described after a broad view of the location in which they take place, *marae*.

Maori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. They identify themselves as various localised *iwi*, perhaps “tribes,” *hapu*, perhaps “clans,” and *whanau*, families (in the widest sense that is typically human rather than the truncated sense that predominates in modernity). Each group traditionally has a place in which significant events are celebrated or ritualised, and in which guests are made. These places consist principally of an open space, full of potential, the *marae atea*. This may be more or less securely bounded but usually has, at least, an identifiable entry point. Across the space is a carved or decorated meeting house to which a number of different names might be attached. The generic names include *whare nui*, meeting house, and *whare tipuna*, ancestral house. Each *whare* also has a name

that identifies it as an ancestor in relation to the local community (inclusive of past, present and future generations). For example, the *whare* Hinemihi now stands in the grounds of Clandon House, UK, and regularly welcomes Maori and their guests, as well as being an object of interest within the heritage industry (see Hooper-Greenhill 2000:49–75). To enter the building is to enter the community in some way. This last phrase (“in some way”) is of utmost significance: only a descendant of the particular ancestor is sufficiently intimate to have the right of entry with impunity. The *marae* is also the local people’s *turangawaewae*, “standing place,” i.e. the premier place where they can stand to participate and be heard in speech-making and other important acts. However, guests are also invited into the *whare* following appropriate completion of protocols of guest-making. Many *marae* complexes also include a *whare kai*, dining hall, separate from the *whare nui* / *tipuna*, but fully integral to the full process of making guests out of strangers. Two of the most intimate — and cultural — activities in life are sex and eating. (In the light of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s, 1998, argument about “multinaturalism,” it is conceivable that this may be true of all life, not only humanity.) That Maori ancestors sometimes engaged in cannibalism is significant: strangers who became guests ate with their hosts, strangers who insisted on being enemies might either eat or be eaten by the locals. That the ancestor / house also eats / receives visitors either by consuming or embracing them is also made clear in door carvings that more-than-represent mouths and/or vaginas.

In short, locals and guests cannot enter the ancestor / house in the same way. The former are already members of the body of the ancestor from whom they are descended and who they enter by right. Guests cannot become descendants. Even if they reside for a long time in a place, their relationships to the ancestor(s) are different. And if relationships *to* the ancestors are different from those of descendants / locals, this has implications for relationships *with* ancestors, locals (hosts), and place. It is this that is generative of my assertion that consideration of *marae* protocols has value for ethical and de-colonising research. However, to talk of entering the ancestor

is to move too swiftly past a process which is intended to enable that intimacy to take place appropriately.

Strangers may approach the *marae* for a variety of reasons, none of which make significant differences to the outworking of the protocols of the ensuing encounter. These are aimed at allowing strangers to express and thereby solidify the relationship they wish to have with the locals. Strangers might become enemies or guests, it is a purpose of the *marae* and its protocols to allow locals and strangers to determine which. Strangers are supposed to pause at the *marae* gate to be invited to come further in. When the women's call offers that invitation, the strangers take a few steps into the creative open space. They bring with them differences that require attention: different ancestry, traditions, habits, "normality," taken-for-granted everyday-ness, knowledge and prestige. These are attended to in a series of stages that respect both locals and visitors, but certainly aim to highlight the prestige and precedence of locals. These stages are implicated in *tapu*, the rules that separate differences of various kinds, and especially of prestige, *mana* (see Mataira 2000). At one key stage a local warrior lays a *taki* before the visitors. This symbolises the God of war, and thereby symbolises conflict. This and the performance of *haka*, warrior posture songs, honour the visitors as potentially worthy enemies. However, the visitors are expected to pick up the *taki* and face the challenge of *haka* without reciprocating violence. By this means, locals and visitors initiate the process of accepting the roles and responsibilities of host-and guesthood. (The alternative would be indicated by attacking the warrior who offers the challenge.)

Assuming that visitors have indicated that guesthood is desirable, matters proceed. My argument here requires this assumption because it is founded on the notion that other relationships would seriously undermine the value of any subsequent research. However, that is to anticipate the outworking of these protocols. Now the nascent hosts and guests sit across a smaller space nearer to the *whare nui*. Speeches are made that serve not only to identify the guests but also to honour the hosts and all that is theirs. Such self-identification may sometimes serve the purpose of indicating existing kinship and/or other

shared interests with the hosts. The recognition of mutual standing on MotherEarth and beneath FatherSky is as important as the recognition of respect to the locals' rights in this place above all others. The precise procedures for speeches and songs vary from place to place — again, it is incumbent on visitors to find out what is expected of them. When the speeches and related songs are completed, the very last space between hosts and guests is closed as people *hongi*, press noses and share breath together. It may be possible at this stage for hosts and guests to eat together, sharing yet another intimacy. This would be significant enough for consideration of research ethics — and some suggestions of its application will be offered shortly. However, the protocols underlying some of what can happen inside the *whare nui* are of considerable importance to the further elaboration of this argument.

On the *marae atea*, the open space in which strangers are made into guests, various conflictual relationships are expressed and symbolised. It is, in some senses, the domain of the God of war. The possibility of conflict, and of being devoured and converted into excrement (more-than symbolising what the victor thinks of the victim), is raised — if only as the remnant of ancestral tradition or perhaps in almost carnivalesque playfulness. However, by the time guests enter the *whare* they have established a level of intimacy. This does not mean that harmony reigns inside. The new intimacy allows hosts and guests to speak freely of concerns and needs, sometimes quite strongly, but always (or so it is intended) on the foundational understanding that a resolution is sought that will not completely diminish either side. Furthermore, guests can seek knowledge or offer skills — both of which might entail change for one side or other, or both. Since this takes place within the ancestor's body (see Harvey 2000) and therefore inside the "body politic," there is strong encouragement to respect the prestige, priority, needs and desires of the hosts. It is, after all, their *turangawaewae*, "standing place," and when they stand they can lean against the ribs or point to the heart and spine of the ancestor who generated them. They can make explicit that which is locally normative. Much of this is descriptively true: for example, hosts and guests are literally "one side or the other" of the *whare*. Inside the

whare conditions are different to those on the *marae atea*. Differences between the two sides are not erased but are prerequisites underlying particular possibilities expressive of emerging new relationships. In short, being a guest is not the same as being a visitor, and is very different from being a stranger who might be an enemy.

It is the sense that locals hold that which guests need that is particularly relevant to this argument since it underscores what all research (ethical or otherwise, dialogical or otherwise, de-colonising or otherwise) is all about: the seeking of knowledge that researchers and their home community does not (yet) have. It is equally important that the hosts can refuse what guests want. On their land, in their ancestor, with their people, they can insist on their sovereign rights. This much is to be expected of those who have been willing to abide by the protocols that got them to this time and space. It is, of course, possible for enemy aggressors to enter the *whare* having defeated the local defenders. However, we need not consider such acts as they are self-evidently generative of compromised understandings. (Colonial museums, for example, displaying stolen or appropriated “artefacts” are necessarily connected with a poverty of explanatory information.)

Marae as Method

Researchers are people who want information, knowledge, understanding. They seek that which they desire among other people. Indeed, understanding those people, or their “culture,” might be the goal of research. Academia has been, almost by (self-)definition, a struggle between objectivity and subjectivity, observers and participants, outsiders and insiders, researchers and natives. The various possible ways of crossing or confusing these boundaries (e.g. going native, becoming a collaborator or an apologist) are the principal threats academics have made against their peers’ careers. Recently, matters have improved. The change has been marked by the increasing prevalence of the word “dialogue” in debates and introductions to methodologies. Thus, the ethnological parts of academia might now be defined not as a struggle but as a dialogue between objectivity and subjectivity, and so on. My central argument is, however, that another position is possible and, in

fact, that it has always been available. Even when “participant observation” and “dialogical research” improved the approaches academics applied, they underestimate or mistake the roles that researchers have always played. Consideration of Maori *marae* protocols promises to greatly improve not only the ethics of research projects but also their intellectual value. That is, the historic goals of academia (knowledge and debate) can be furthered rather than constrained by ethical and de-colonising research approaches.

Researchers confront their potential hosts as possible guests and possible enemies. They can never really become “natives” because they cannot share ancestry. They cannot observe a ceremony without changing it in some way, even if only into a ceremony in which there is an observer. Researchers cannot ever entirely take-for-granted what is self-evident to their hosts. Even when hosts are self-reflexive and happy to theorise about their lifestyle and/or practice, they are still more securely “at home” with themselves than visiting researchers will ever be.

Colonialist researchers may assert that their training and their status establishes their right to observe and “discover” whatever they desire to know (“Trust me, I’m a researcher”?). Their insistence on “objectivity” distances them to a degree and sometimes determines (for them and those they observe) conflictual stances and engagements. It should also diminish the value placed on the results and output of their research.

So, all putative researchers arrive at the place where their potential hosts observe them. Both sides then negotiate the relationships between the identities and knowledges which each takes-for-granted. Guest researchers actively seek (sometimes by waiting) the invitation of hosts to enter the process of relationship building. The priority of the locals is fundamental. As is their prestige. This is not to say that researchers must believe everything they are told, far less that the outcomes of their research must broadcast understandings precisely as asserted by their hosts. It is, however, to acknowledge that since researchers seek to understand what their hosts know, or do, or perceive themselves to be, or some similar matter that is the property of the

hosts, it is imperative that researchers engage respectfully in dialogical conversation with their hosts.

The process of relationship building may not itself be the required dialogue that explores what researchers wish to know. Such dialogues may follow later. This is, perhaps, equivalent to saying that the ethics committees of universities or funding bodies are, at the very least, matched by reception committees that provide potential guest-researchers with opportunities to explain their purposes and positions. Or, perhaps more significantly, researchers should see their potential hosts as having powerful and non-negotiable rights in determining the ethical value of a project. Guests are made by hosts. The visitor who asserts a right to know, to participate, and even to speak, may meet negative reactions and be provided with inaccurate information. Hosts might refuse to accept a visitor as a guest, they might even decide the visitor is an enemy. Indigenous agency has commonly been expressed in misdirecting and confusing colonising researchers. Thus, researchers should not assume that becoming a guest is as easy as turning up and offering oneself as a dialogue partner.

However, assuming that the researcher has been accepted and converted into a guest by hosts, there are further processes by which hosts and guests elaborate their relationship and, thereby, further the project. This is the equivalent to processes inside the *whare*, the ancestral body of the hosts, where the discussion begins, intensifies and seeks a resolution that benefits all concerned. Perhaps this is “research proper”: the attempt to gain knowledge and understanding. The hosts have it (in some way), the researcher desires it. The hosts express it in modes they deem appropriate and arising from what is normal and normative locally. The researcher attempts to translate it for their own community (as Cox 1998 points out: academia has its own powerful ancestors from whom we have inherited a language that requires such translation exercises). Or maybe neither researcher nor hosts know or understand, and only together will they achieve their goals. Perhaps researchers know things that the locals want to know. Almost everything is possible, happily it is not my purpose to explore the parameters and definitions of research. My sole interest here is in

the further evolution of more ethical and less colonial (or more anti-colonial) methods. Thus, Captain Cook is important.

Guests, Traders and Colonists

Marae protocols and the structures that stage them originated in encounters between different Maori groups (including *iwi*, *hapu* and *whanau*). The ordinary processes of settlement, trade, kinship, conflict and so on determined the nature and frequency of such encounters. The available cultural and physical materials provided the possibilities and constraints of the structures containing, enabling and enhancing them. With the arrival of Captain Cook and his crews, and further European traders and colonists, both the need for and the possibility of elaboration occurred. New visitors could be offered either the same possibilities as Maori visitors: to be guests or enemies. Since etiquette required that guests must be sheltered, it was in some ways a happy coincidence that this increase in the number of potential guests also entailed the availability of metal tools that could ease the production of the necessary physical structures. The cultural evolution continued and still continues — as often it is necessary to say “in spite or because of” continuing colonialism. One aspect of that evolution is Ngati Ranana’s performance of *Maoritanga*, Maori culture, in the UK and Europe (see Ngati Ranana 2002, and Harvey 2001).

All of this is important because my argument is not that noble savages could teach us a thing or two about being gracious and long-suffering hosts. It is not that Maori are unique in having methods for converting strangers into more acceptable kinds of role players, and that these roles are emblematic of *new* research relationships. The precise point is that *marae* protocols and structures were elaborated in the encounter with visitors whose motives *and* knowledges were often thoroughly colonialist. Cook’s journeys in Oceania were motivated, for example, both by attempts to build trading relationships, by scientific research (tracing the path of Venus across the sun) and by map-making that would deny indigenous sovereignty by transforming islands into colonies. Colonialism might, in this light, be defined as the refusal to accede to the authority of locals in defining guesthood, kinship,

normality, the application of new technologies, and so much more. Maori, of course, had engaged in journeys of exploration and conflict before Europeans arrived—and developed *marae* protocols in the process. These included possibilities of conflict, refusals of guesthood and the enactment of enemy-hood. Maori had attacked other Maori, taking lands and enslaving enemies. This too could be considered colonialist, except that it typically occurred within a shared culture, and colonialism is more than conflict. In terms of research protocols, colonialism benefits only those who conduct the research and, through them, the community of the researcher. Not only is knowledge power, but the process of acquiring and disseminating knowledge is conducted as an exercise of power. Or, at least, this is often true.

Things can be different. Relationships, especially, can be different. One difference between the trader-as-guest and the trader-colonialist is that the former seeks the potential host's welcome. The colonialist enters by force or deceit. One difference between researcher-as-guest and colonialist-researcher is that the latter refuses to concede that the "object" of their research could refuse to be observed. Some promoters of dialogical research insist that equality is self-evident and thereby challenge colonialist researchers who enact their own power, precedence and profile (e.g. Spickard 2002:246–9). However, the truth is likely to be more complex than this. Equality is, perhaps, a matter of the balance of different powers. Researchers are powerful in ways that cannot be matched by many of those they research. Researchers have access to means and modes of communication denied to many others. Frequently they are funded in ways that certainly privilege them. Nonetheless, the guest-researcher must necessarily recognise the power of hosts whose permission or denial can be absolute. Even to establish the host-guest relationship (and therefore the researched-researcher relationship) requires recognition on the sovereignty, rights, priority and knowledge of the hosts. Gender too can be an important determinative of access to informants or information, let alone relationships (e.g. Bell 1984). Equality is, therefore, a valuable perspective, but that it is a key plank in the platform of the Enlightenment's liberal humanism reveals that it is not universal. As a tool in the scholar's

self-critical and self-reflexive approach it is invaluable, but it cannot be demanded of, or imposed on, others. To become a guest-researcher is to bow to the power/prestige of hosts and to struggle with one's own powerful position.

Participant observation is a compromise that seeks to help (outside) observers participate (within limits). It is matched by those kinds of reflexivity in which insiders are helped to reflexively observe that in which they participate. Guesthood arises as another relationship distinct from that between insiders and outsiders, or participants and observers. Guest-researchers recognise the powerful priority, sovereignty and intellectual property rights of hosts, especially as they wait to know whether they will be made guest or enemy by hosts/locals. They recognise that knowledge is gained in relationships, performance, negotiation and that these require active presence and a fuller participation than that available even to those who deem themselves participant observers. The recognition that the act of observation changes things, including the observer (Pratchett 1994:8), requires an acknowledgement that researchers change that which they research (however they do it) as well as themselves. The refinement offered by guesthood as research is that such researchers expect to be changed and offer themselves to potential hosts precisely so that the change from visitor (potential guest/potential enemy) can be made by such hosts. And the hosts' main reason for making that change by welcoming the new guest can only be that they too are ready to risk change. If, then, research is precisely about change, it is helpful to initiate it by respectfully performing the protocols which change people. Hopefully, such initiation will lead to outcomes worthy of host-guest relationships, e.g. more fully dialogical, respectful and complex discussion of outcomes to which those researched also have access and the right of response. In other words, research-guesthood widens and enriches the communities of those committed to improving understanding.

Why Is This Postcolonial?

Finally, briefly, and in an attempt to sum up this whole project in answer to one key question (why is guesthood postcolonial?): Guest-

hood is no longer about “others” (the constructed alterity imagined by a colonising elite) since the host-guest relationship includes “us,” and because it is predicated on the host’s sovereign power to initiate and/or reject potential guests. This third position that is neither “subjective native” nor “objective outsider” has always been a possibility and, indeed, has often been offered. Only the compromising entanglement of academia in colonial power dynamics has prevented us knowing the full benefits of being guests among or with those we research. If so, one remaining barrier to ethical and decolonising research methods is the difficulty of knowing what processes any particular potential host community might have (or recognise, or accept) for making visitors into guests. However, since Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1999) and Janet Chernela (2001) make it abundantly clear that even enmity is thoroughly relational and even integral to the continuing evolution of sociality, it should be possible for careful and enthusiastic researchers to find some entry point into communities in which they remain definitely “outsiders.”

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BUDDHISM, RELIGION, AND THE CONCEPT OF “GOD”

ILKKA PYYSIÄINEN

Summary

It is here argued that, although the Buddha and the buddhas are not regarded as gods by Buddhists, they clearly fulfill the criteria of “counter-intuitive agents” as they have been presented by Pascal Boyer. To the extent that religion can be understood as human thought, action, and experience that involve counter-intuitive representations, Buddhism does not have to be the problematic touchstone for a global concept of religion.

God and Religion

Western folk theories, as well as theological theories, of religion are based on the concept of “God.” Moreover, as Benson Saler (2000) has argued, even the non-theological scholarly concept of “religion” has been determined by the prototype effect of the Judeo-Christian tradition; by the same token the concept of “God” has come to occupy a prominent role in it. Scholars have implicitly assumed that such beings as for example Vishnu, Zeus, Manitou, or Mithras, all in some sense belong to the same category; they all are gods. Yet it has never been clarified what it is that makes gods gods. It seems that, although the Christian God is considered only one member in this wider category, actually the whole category has been created on the basis of the Judeo-Christian idea of God (Pyysiäinen 1997; Pyysiäinen and Ketola 1999; cf. also Kazanas 2001).

That calling all these beings “gods” may be problematic has been realized by many scholars, and concepts such as “superhuman beings” (Lawson and McCauley 1990:61, 82, 89, 112, 124, 165), “nonnatural entities” (Barrett and Keil 1996), etc. have been substituted for “God.” This, however, in no way helps us explain what exactly it is that separates these beings from other kinds of beings and unites them into a coherent category. A new label does not solve the problem;

only a new theory could do it. The concept of the “supernatural” is notoriously problematic, and “superhumanity” shares the same problems (see Saler 1977). These terms are mere labels with no theory concerning the objects thus labeled. Superhuman beings are identified as such by mere intuition; the set of characteristics that count as “supernatural” or “superhuman” have never been specified (Pyysiäinen and Ketola 1999; Pyysiäinen 2001:9–23).

A somewhat different view has been presented by Stewart Guthrie (1980; 1993; 1996) who thinks that religion is typified by belief in humanlike but nonhuman beings. Such anthropomorphism and animism derive from the fact that all perception is inferential, and our inferences are directed towards ascribing the maximum of organization to our perceptual stimuli. Therefore, we tend to see “faces in the clouds,” meaning and purpose in everything that happens, etc. This has been of evolutionary advantage for us: it is for example always better to mistake the wind playing in the long grass for a snake than vice versa. Religious beliefs about nonhuman but humanlike beings are one manifestation of this general tendency to animism and anthropomorphism. What distinguishes religious animism and anthropomorphism from other forms of the same phenomenon has not been specified by Guthrie. Yet he is not willing to discard the category of “religion,” but only sees it as a construction based on the prototype effect of some especially salient phenomena (cf. Boyer 1996; Saler 2000; Pyysiäinen 2002a).

There are thus great difficulties involved in conceptualizing religion as belief in god(s), superhuman agents, etc., although we intuitively think that some such beings, nevertheless, are essential in religion. As is well-known, Buddhism has been the favorite example of scholars who have argued that we should find some other way of defining religion than the one based on the idea of belief in gods or superhuman beings (e.g. Durkheim 1965:37–57; Herbrechtsmeier 1993). It may therefore be useful to re-examine the question of the Buddha’s divinity, in order to find a new way of approaching the concepts of “God” and “religion.” I shall not try to construct a new “definition” of religion; in definitions we only reduce the defined concepts to undefined ones

without that much benefit from the point of view of empirical study would be gained. Theories are more important than definitions (see Boyer 1994b:32–34).

The Buddha, buddhas, and buddhahood

The Westerners that first came into contact with Buddhism, guided by their Christian background, identified the Buddha and the buddhas as god(s). In due course it, however, dawned on them that the Buddhists did not consider buddhas as gods (*devas*) (see, e.g., Windisch 1917; Lubac 1952; Schwab 1984; de Jong 1974; 1979). But neither are they mere human beings. As the late J.W. de Jong (1979:27) has pointed out, the simple dichotomy man-God is not enough to account for the special status of the Buddha and the buddhas in the Buddhist religion; buddhas rather are beings *sui generis* and thus form a third category, in addition to “man” and “God.”

Étienne Lamotte (1948:37–49) has distinguished three research traditions vis-à-vis the figure of the Buddha: mythological, rationalistic, and pragmatic. Émile Senart (1882) and Hendrik Kern (1882–1884:1:296–356), inspired by the nature mythological tradition in comparative religion, saw the legend of the Buddha as a personification of astral phenomena; Kern even doubted whether there ever was a person called “Buddha.” The rationalists, in turn, thought that behind the legendary elements there was a historical kernel: the Buddha had been for his earliest followers only a wise man and a teacher of ethics as well as of some kind of “psychology” (e.g. Oldenberg 1903:84–230; Rhys Davids 1880). The pragmatic tradition is best exemplified by Lamotte (1948) himself; it emphasizes that the legendary elements belong even to the oldest records we have, and that it thus is not easy to distinguish fact from fantasy in the Buddha legend (also Lamotte 1958:718–733; cf. Thomas 1975; 1971) (see de Jong 1979:23–26). Yet also Lamotte has been criticized for valuing the “canonical” texts as more representative of “true” Buddhism, compared to non-canonical texts (Pye 1973).

André Bareau’s detailed efforts notwithstanding, it is very difficult to determine how the various beliefs concerning the Buddha have

evolved (see Bareau 1953; 1962; 1963; 1969; 1970–1971; 1974a; 1974b; 1979; 1980). Bareau accepted the view first put forward by Jean Przyluski (1918–1920:11:515–526, 13:365–429, 15:5–6) that for his first followers the Buddha was just a human being. During the Maurya period (322–185 BC) he then came to be equated with the mythical “wheel-turning king” (*cakravartin rāja*) and thus was seen as a unique being, or a “functional god” of sorts (Bareu 1962:32–33; 1963:361–362; 1969; 1974a:288; 1979:2, 64, 72–73). More recently, there have been a number of attempts to interpret and explain the Buddha legend according to its supposed “symbolic functions” and “mythical meanings” (e.g. Lévy 1982; Elder 1983; Pyysiäinen 1987; see Pye 1979).

How living Buddhists actually represent the concept has so far not been studied, except for Gananath Obeyesekere’s (1966) paper on Sinhalese Buddhists’ perception of the Buddha. Intellectually, Sinhalese Buddhists recognized that the Buddha is dead, but yet emotionally felt that he is somehow present in his relics. More experimental work on such conceptualization, along the lines suggested by Justin Barrett and Frank Keil, is needed. Barrett and Keil (1996) showed through a series of experimental studies that American college students had two kinds of representations of God: the theological concept was based on such rehearsed cultural knowledge as for example that God is omniscient, omnipotent, etc. However, in fast online reasoning tasks people unconsciously used a more humanlike representation; God could for example answer a prayer only after he first had finished answering another prayer. Barrett (1998) subsequently replicated the study in India, substituting Brahman, Shiva, Vishnu, and Krishna for God (four different versions of the stories were prepared); the results were essentially the same. Such experimenting should also be done to find out how Buddhists use the concept of “buddha” in their online reasoning.

The early Buddhist texts, however, give support to de Jong’s (1979:27) claim that, in Buddhist beliefs, the Buddha and the buddhas are a *sui generis* type of beings. To provide a couple of examples, in a Theravāda text the Buddha replies, when asked, that he is neither a

god (*deva*), an “angel” (*gandhabba*), a “demon” (*yakkha*), nor a human being, but a buddha (*Aṅguttaranikāya* II 38–39). He is “unique, without a peer, without counterpart, incomparable, unequalled, matchless, unrivalled, best of bipeds” (*Aṅguttaranikāya* I 22). To Cunda, the goldsmith, the Buddha said that the meal offered by him (which eventually killed the Buddha) was such that it could not be digested by gods or men, only by the *Tathāgata* (i.e. the Buddha) (*Dīghanikāya* II 126–128).

What makes the Buddha unique in Buddhist beliefs is the supposed fact that some kind of inner experience, the nature of which is only very vaguely described, had transformed the suffering and frustrated Gautama into a “perfectly enlightened one” (*sammāsambuddha*). Yet all the texts lack precision of what exactly is supposed to have happened in Gautama’s mind at the moment of his “enlightenment.” The word *bodhi* (“enlightenment”) appears only in the *Mahāsaccakasutta* where it is related how the Buddha ponders whether there could be “another way to enlightenment,” apart from self-mortification. In the *Vinayapiṭaka*, in a probably more recent passage, we read that Gautama had recently become a “fully enlightened one” (*paṭhamabhisambuddho*); his “enlightenment” clearly being taken as something not in need of further explanation (*Vinayapitakam* I 1).

Even the word *nirvāṇa* appears in the earliest accounts of the Buddha’s experience only in one passage, in the *Ariyapariyesanāsutta*. There it is said that after years of vain attempts, while meditating in the surroundings of Uruvelā, the Buddha immediately attained “the excellent freedom from bondage, *nibbāna*,” that was not subject to birth, aging, illness, sorrow and suffering. At that very moment Gautama knew: “My liberation (*vimutti*) is steadfast. This is the last birth; there will be no more (re)births.” (*Majjhimanikāya* I 167; see Bareau 1980).

According to the *Suttas Mahāsaccaka*, *Bhayabherava* and *Dvedhāvitakka*, the liberation was preceded by the four states of meditation (*jhāna*) and the three mental abilities (*ñāṇa*). The Buddha describes his experience after the third ability: “When I was liberated to freedom I knew: birth is destroyed, *Brahma*-life lived and the task accomplished.

There will be no new life.” (*Majjhimanikāya* I 17–23, 114–117, 247–249). Thus, the *Ariyapariyesanāsutta* is completely silent about how the Buddha reached his *nirvāṇa*, and the *Mahāsaccakasutta* describes the liberation as due to the practice of the four *jhānas* (“states of meditation”) which the Buddha, however, already had practised for years without success. The *jhāna* states are described by a traditional formula that appears in the Tipitaka 86 times. They are given four different functions: 1) they are preparation for insight (*vipassanā*); 2) preparation for the four or five *arūpajhānas* (“formless meditations”); 3) preparation for the “ways of living like *Brahma*” (*brahmavihāras*); or 4) an independent way to *nirvāṇa* (Griffiths 1983:57–59, 62–65).

As to the three *ñānas* — the ability to remember one’s past lives, the ability to see how all beings are (re)born and die, and the ability to understand the *āsavas* (“intoxicants”) as they arise and are destroyed — only the last one is specifically Buddhist; the other two belong to the traditional list of six paranormal faculties (*abhiññā*) as they are known in ancient Indian sources (see Jayatilleke 1963:437–438; Jaini 1974; *Anguttaranikāya* I 254–256). Therefore the knowledge of the *āsavas* has been seen as the real essence of “enlightenment” as here described (Démieville 1927:283, 290–291; Bareau 1963:79–84).

The four *āsavas* are: sensual pleasures, becoming, ignorance and (later) “views.” These appear in the Tipitaka in stereotypical descriptions of how someone achieved *nirvāṇa* by liberating himself from the *āsavas*, as in the case of the Buddha’s first five converts who attained *nirvāṇa* by merely listening to the Buddha’s teaching (*Vinayapitakam* I 10–20). No further explanation of the nature of this liberation is provided, and in later Buddhism the *āsavas* no longer play a central role (Johansson 1985:177; Masefield 1986:85). At some point in time, the idea that the four *jhānas* culminate in the destruction of the intoxicants has been connected with the view that the insight is based on an understanding of the “four noble truths.” In this way, a combination of these two alternatives has come to be considered the true nature of the liberating insight (Bronkhorst 1986:95–98, 100–104; cf. Schmithausen 1981:205).

There is also the (possibly later) belief that Gautama had striven for the perfect enlightenment through several cycles of rebirths, which implies that before his last rebirth as Gautama he had already accumulated such religious merit that he could for example choose by himself into which family he will be born (see Bareau 1962; 1963; 1974b; 1980). Although the belief that in distant past six other buddhas had preceded Gautama may not have belonged to the earliest tradition, it must predate the split of the various schools, as the names of the six buddhas are identical in the texts of the various schools. After the *Sūtra* period, the number of the previous buddhas was increased into 24 (e.g. in the *Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Cariyāpiṭaka*). In the *Sūtras*, it is not yet implied that all beings can strive for buddhahood; the career of a *bodhisattva* (buddha-to-be) is first presented as an alternative for the ideal of an enlightened disciple (*arhat*) in the Sarvāstivādin *Avadāna* literature (*Dīghanikāya* II 225; Thomas 1971:167–168; Foucher 1949:148).

In Mahāyāna, the idea of the *bodhisattva* career was then followed by the idea of a “Tathāgata embryo” or “womb of the Tathāgata” (*tathāgatagarbha*), inherent in all beings (Ruegg 1969:31–32). This idea can be understood in three different ways: 1) All beings are the interior (“womb”) of *Tathāgata*; 2) *Tathāgata* is identical with the inner essence (“embryo”) of all living beings; 3) the inner essence of living beings is the “embryo” of the *Tathāgata* (e.g. the *Ratnagotravibhāga*; see Ruegg 1969; Pyysiäinen 1993:108–110; King 1991:48–56).

The *tathāgatagarbha* idea is closely related to the idea of a “Buddha nature” (Chinese *fo xing*, Japanese *busshō*). The idea that all sentient beings possess the Buddha nature was appropriated by the four major indigenous schools of Chinese Buddhism, and was then transmitted to other East Asian schools of Buddhism. The Sanskrit equivalent of the Chinese *fo xing* has been much debated, but now *buddhadhātu* is rather generally agreed upon. This doctrine holds that all sentient beings already are buddhalike; they just do not realize it. Buddha nature thus is understood both as the potential to realize buddhahood, and that buddhahood itself (King 1991). Without entering the subtleties of Mahāyāna doctrine, I merely want to point out that there is a diversity of opinions on the constituents of buddhahood and its relationship

with other important metaphysical terms. That some kind of buddhahood exists, is beyond doubt; it is only its conceptual formulations that vary. In many Mahāyāna treatises such most basic concepts as “buddhahood” and *nirvāṇa* are even said to be mere “words and signs” and thus not to correspond to the Ultimate Truth (*paramārtha satya*) (see Pyysiäinen 1993:104–124). That has never meant that Buddhist practice would have been given up as unnecessary for spiritual development, though (see Sharf 1995).

Although the conceptions regarding the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* or “enlightenment” are in this sense vague, they are, of course, of primary importance in defining what makes the Buddha and the buddhas something unique. The Buddha is a “perfectly enlightened one”; he is also enlightened by himself (unlike his disciples), and wants to lead others to enlightenment (unlike the *paccekabuddhas*, “solitary buddhas”). Whatever *nirvāṇa* and perfect enlightenment are, they characterize the buddhas. The traditions picture the Buddha as having found a completely novel way to “liberation,” without unequivocally explaining what it actually consisted of (see *Majjhimanikāya* I 163–166, 240–247; II 212). After his “enlightenment” the Buddha approached the five ascetics, with whom he had practised austerities, and replied to their greetings: “Monks, do not address *Tathāgata* by name and by the word ‘friend.’ Monks, *Tathāgata* is an *arahat*, a perfectly enlightened one. Listen, o monks, deathless has been found, I will instruct you, I will teach *dhamma*.” (*Vinayapiṭakam* I 8–10). Gautama had become a “buddha,” whatever that was understood to mean. The important thing here is that it is possible for the Buddhist to have the belief about the uniqueness of the Buddha and the buddhas without having discursive beliefs about the precise nature of this uniqueness; the idea of a Buddha-essence can be used as a premise in reasoning without that the nature of the essence is specified (see Ahn *et al.* 2001).

Counter-intuitiveness

In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha and the buddhas are unequivocally distinguished from the *devas* (‘gods’). It is, however, to be noticed that the *devas* are understood very differently than what

God is in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, despite the fact that etymologically *deva* is related to the Latin *deus*. Both derive from **deivos* (‘shining, sky’). (The English equivalent of *deus*, ‘god,’ derives from the Indo-European *ghu-*, ‘to call, invoke.’) In denying that the Buddha was a god, the early Buddhists were not of course denying the Judeo-Christian God; this idea was not even known to them. Instead, they were denying the then current ideas of *devas* and *īśvaras* (‘Lords’) (see Nāgārjuna’s *Īśvarakartṛtvanirākṛtiḥ*). In contrast to the Brahmanic gods, the Buddha was a human being that then became a buddha (whatever it means). Yet in many of the somewhat later texts he is more like a heavenly being that became a man, than the other way around (see Pyysiäinen 1993:144). In a sense, the Buddha, indeed, occupies in the Buddhist belief environment a similar position as God in the Judeo-Christian beliefs. I shall return to this soon.

To the extent that the Buddha and the buddhas are beings *sui generis* and thus differ from human beings, we should be able to specify what is it that makes them different from humans. I suggest that the recent theorizing by Pascal Boyer (1994a, b; 1996; 2000a, b; 2001) offers good means of reconceptualizing the relationships between buddhas, gods, and human beings (see Pyysiäinen 2001:9–23). Boyer has adopted Fred Sommers’ (1959) “ontological tree” and Frank Keil’s (1979) way of employing this idea in empirical work as the starting point in developing his ideas of “intuitive ontology” and such counter-intuitive violations against it as is commonly found in religions. Sommers (1959) argues that ontological distinctions are manifested as predicate restrictions: any given term can have only certain kinds of predicates; thus, knowing some of these allows us to predict what other predicates are applicable. Keil (1979; 1996), for his part, has done experimental research on the evolution of ontological distinctions in small children. His results by and large seem to confirm Sommers’ suggestions, although the categories used are slightly different. Even preschoolers are capable of mentally representing ontological distinctions; this, however, is intuitive knowledge: the subjects are not necessarily aware of having it, and cannot always conceptualize it. Yet they are, for example, able to predict the applicability of various kinds of predicates: if

something can cry, then it can also be tired; if it is made of metal, it can also be fixed, and so on, even when the subjects do not know what this something is. The ontological status of a given term is inferred from its use, and once it is inferred, it can be used in an appropriate manner.

The insights of Sommers and Keil can be enriched by arguments about the modularity, or domain-specificity, of the human mind, developed in evolutionary psychology and cognitive science (e.g. Atran 1990; Tooby and Cosmides 1995; Cosmides and Tooby 1994; Karmiloff-Smith 1992; Hirschfeld and Gelman 1994b; Sperber 1994; 1996; Mithen 1998). It is on this basis that Boyer has developed the idea of “intuitive ontology,” i.e. tacit, intuitive knowledge concerning the division of objects into certain basic ontological categories, together with the corresponding mechanisms of reasoning. Boyer argues that there are certain evolved mechanisms that are somehow genetically encoded and are bound to appear when a subject matures in normal conditions. Contextual factors thus play a role in cognitive development, although development is genetically coded.

Boyer has presented slightly varying lists of the intuitive ontological categories. When referring to Keil’s work, he writes that “ontological categories like ABSTRACT OBJECT, LIVING THING, ANIMAL, EVENT, and so on are arranged in a taxonomical tree according to precise formal constraints” (Boyer 1994b:101). In his 1996 paper, he says: “Let me first consider ontological distinctions between such domains as PERSONS, ARTIFACTS, ANIMATE BEINGS, EVENTS and ABSTRACT OBJECTS” (Boyer 1996:84). And, again, “Intuitive ontology comprises ‘naïve theories’ of broad domains such as PERSON, ANIMAL, PLANT, or ARTIFACT” (Boyer 1998:878). Later, he writes, referring to his earlier work, “Indeed, a ‘catalogue’ that uses only the categories of person, animal and artefact and includes only breaches of physical and cognitive properties associated with those categories virtually exhausts cultural variation in this domain (Boyer 1996; 1998)” (Boyer 2000a:103). In yet another paper, Boyer (2000b:198) distinguishes between PERSONS, ANIMALS, PLANTS, ARTIFACTS, and NATURAL OBJECTS. Barrett (2000), referring to Boyer (2000a), distinguishes persons, animals, plants, artifacts, and natural non-living things.

Whatever the most basic division is, and how it is enriched in maturation, the important thing is that it forms the natural basis of the counter-intuitive representations of various religious traditions. “Counter-intuitiveness” is a technical term referring to violations against intuitive expectations about ontological categories; therefore, “counter-ontological” may have been a better choice than “counter-intuitive,” as (Boyer 2001:65) recently has remarked. It is important to realize we are here talking about violations of non-conscious, *intuitive* expectations, not of explicitly held views, theories, or “worldviews.” “Counter-intuitive” also does not mean funny, strange, or untrue; it only means something that contradicts panhuman intuitive expectations of how entities behave. These expectations can be violated either by transferring to a representation a property it intuitively should not have, or by denying to it a property it intuitively should have. Thus are formed for example the ideas of personal beings without a body (gods, spirits, etc). and of various kinds of artifacts that have psychological properties (e.g. a statue that hears prayers). On this basis, we are, in principle, able to construct a “catalogue of the supernatural,” i.e. to create by a simple cross-tabulation a list of the various possible forms counter-intuitive representations (Boyer 1994a, b; 2000a; 2000b:196–199; 2001:61–71; Barrett 2000). According to Boyer, such counter-intuitive representations constitute the category of “religious ideas,” and concepts that merely confirm intuitive ontologies are *ipso facto* nonreligious, although counter-intuitiveness as such is not a sufficient criterion for religion (Boyer 1994a:408; 1994b:122, 124; see also Atran 1996:234; 1998; Pyysiäinen 2001:197–236).

It is their counter-intuitiveness that makes religious concepts interesting and attention-grabbing; it is their intuitive properties that make it possible to make inferences from them. Thus, in oral transmission, it is their optimal counter-intuitiveness that gives religious concepts and beliefs an advantage in cultural selection. They contain one salient violation of intuitive expectations, while in other aspects they remain intuitive; therefore they have such inferential potential that makes them useful from an everyday point of view. For example, a statue that hears prayers only involves one violation of expectations: a physical object

that hears. A statue that hears prayers from a 100 miles distance is too complicated an idea and therefore unlikely to survive in cultural transmission, without getting simplified (Boyer 1994b:113–119; 2001:61–89; Barrett and Nyhof 2001). Therefore, we do not find in folk traditions representations such as “(a) cat that can never die, has wings, is made of steel, experiences time backwards, lives underwater, and speaks Russian” (Barrett 1998:611).

In religious representations, violations of biological expectations most often relate to birth and death: gods, saints, etc. are born in some unusual way, and also their death either involves something extraordinary, or they do not actually die at all. Among other biological violations of expectations are extraordinary size and other bodily abnormalities, a body that radiates light, etc. Violations of intuitive physics include, for example, various kinds of miraculous deeds: walking upon the water, clairvoyance, invisibility, etc. Counter-intuitive psychology, for its part, includes phenomena such as omniscience, mind-reading, etc. In many instances, the violation concerns at once two or all three of these domains (see Loomis 1948; Thompson 1955–59; Pyysiäinen 2002b). It is also to be noted that finding counter-intuitiveness in religious representations does not mean to say anything about the truth or meaning of these representations; in this respect various interpretative possibilities remain open.

I suggest that representations of the Buddha and the buddhas are different from representations of humans in the sense that they involve counter-intuitive elements. Yet they are at the same time also similar to representations of humans in the sense that they include the folk-psychological idea of an agent characterized by a belief-and-desire psychology (with some non-standard elements in it). This, however, also means that representations of the Buddha and the buddhas have much in common with representations of gods: both are counter-intuitive agents. I shall not consider the various fictive buddhas and bodhisattvas, as their “superhumanity” is in any case so obvious.

This view explains our intuitive understanding of Buddhism as a religion, as well as the conception that the Buddha and the buddhas in some sense belong to the same category as gods. It is the formal prop-

erty of being counter-intuitive that allows us to classify the Buddha and the buddhas together with gods; the specific content of representations of the Buddha and the buddhas differentiate them from representations of gods. Counter-intuitive representations also can be put into different kinds of uses. It seems to me that representations of the Buddha and the buddhas partly serve similar functions as representations of God in the Judeo-Christian traditions, some important differences notwithstanding. In the following, I first provide a few examples of the counter-intuitive properties of the Buddha and the buddhas; after that, I briefly discuss the functions of representations of the Buddha and the buddhas. Finally, I comment on the possibility of a globally valid concept of religion.

Counter-intuitive properties of the Buddha and the buddhas

The representations of the Buddha and the buddhas involve many kinds of violations of intuitive expectations. As it is not always possible to disentangle biological from the physical, or even from the psychological, I shall give examples of the Buddha’s and the buddhas’ counter-intuitive properties, without trying to classify them. Yet it is clear that all of the three categories discussed above are involved in the counter-intuitive representation of the Buddha and the buddhas.

As to the birth of the Buddha, he is reported to have resided in the heaven of the happy gods, before choosing by himself into which family to be born, and before descending into the womb of his mother. The mother then in due course became pregnant, without intercourse with her husband (*Majjhimanikāya* III 119–124; *Dīghanikāya* II 12–15). In the later sources, her dream about the *bodhisattva* entering (or coming out from) her womb through her right side in the form of a white elephant, without piercing her side, is described as something that actually happened. In for example the *Mahāvastu*, the *bodhisattva* is said to be born virginally on the strength of his own karmic merit and to have come down from heaven to earth in order to enlighten men who have become blind (*Mahāvastu* I 77–78, 113–115, 134). He is born in a “mind-made” body (*manomayakāya*) from the right side of his mother, yet without piercing that side (*Mahāvastu* I 117–118, 174;

II 18). The Buddha thus no longer is a man who became buddha, but a buddha who became man.

The Buddha's death also involves counter-intuitive imagery. Before his death, the Buddha's skin is reported to have become somehow radiant; the Buddha then explained that this was always so when a buddha was enlightened or was about to enter *parinirvāṇa* (*Dīghanikāya* II 133–134). His death is also described as having been accompanied by an earthquake (*Dīghanikāya* II 156). Finally, the Buddha is reported never to have answered the question of where he will be after his death, which may or may not count as a violation of intuitive expectations (cf. Bering and Bjorklund 2002). According to the Buddhist tradition, *nirvāṇa* does not mean simple annihilation; this view has then lead to the problem of what happens after an enlightened one dies and is not reborn. This question is never given a clear answer in Buddhist texts (see *Majjhimanikāya* I 136–138; *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, p. 155 Lamotte). On the other hand, after his death, the Buddha is believed to be present in his relics (see above).

Buddhas also are believed to appear in different forms or bodies, such as “the body of own essence” (*svābhāvikakāya*), “the body of enjoyment” (*sāmbhogakāya*), and “the apparitional body” (*nirmāṇakāya*), described in Mahāyāna sources (e.g. *Ratnagotravibhāga*, pp. 289–290, 324; *Mahāyānasamgraha* X 1). The body of own essence is the indivisible and uncompounded (*asamskrta*), inconceivable *Dharma*-body, the Buddhist “Absolute.” The body of enjoyment is a “magical” outflow (*niṣyanda*) of the *Dharma*-body and manifests *Dharma* for the benefit of living beings. The apparitional bodies are the bodies of the various historical buddhas. In this way the Buddha appears in various forms, without ever being separated from the *Dharma*-body (*Ratnagotravibhāga*, pp. 326–331; *Mahāyānasamgraha* X 1, X 6). Asaṅga for example writes that, although the body of enjoyment and the apparitional body are transitory, the Tathāgata's body (*Tathāgatakāya*) is eternal because the other two bodies lean on the *Dharma*-body, and joy and apparitions never cease (*Mahāyānasamgraha* X 37) (see Pyysiäinen 1993:132–137; Lamotte 1958:689–690).

The Buddha is also said to have the 32 major and 80 minor marks that characterize the mythical Great Kings (the *cakravartins*) as well as buddhas. The marks include, for example, thousand-spoked wheel figures on the soles of feet, webbed fingers and toes, penis in a sheath, jaws like a lion’s, 40 teeth, etc. (*Dīghanikāya* III 142–145). This list probably derives from old Indian folk religion, and may also have been modified according to what was seen in the statues of Buddha made in northwestern India around the beginning of the Common era (Thomas 1975:220–222; Lamotte 1958:479–486; Bareau 1969:13).

The Buddha also is reported to have had paranormal abilities and to have performed miracles, although he is said to have emphasized that one should not boast with paranormal abilities. In addition to the six traditional *abhiññā* (see above), he is for example recounted to have crossed the river miraculously, without a ferry (*Dīghanikāya* II 83–98). The *Mahāvastu* of the Lokottaravāda school (“transcendentalists”), for its part, teaches that the buddhas are otherworldly (*lokottara*). “There is nothing in the Buddhas that can be measured by the standard of the world, but everything appertaining to the great seers is transcendent (*lokottara*)” (*Mahāvastu* I 125).

Representations of the Buddha and the buddhas thus in many ways violate against ordinary ontological expectations, yet retaining the kernel of the intuitive belief-and-desire psychology. Not only biological and physical but also psychological expectations are violated: the Buddha and the buddhas are not constrained by ordinary lawful biological and physical processes, and also their minds work in non-standard ways. Although the Buddha was a human being, the followers’ representations of him have, in the course of time, gradually grown ever more counter-intuitive.

Representations of the Buddha and the buddhas include both counter-intuitive, intuitive and normal, and odd but not counter-intuitive features. The way they combine goes against Boyer’s idea of a cognitive optimum: there is not only one violation of biology or physics, but several, and this is so also with regard to psychology. This might be explained by the fact that the optimum only concerns orally transmitted folk traditions where constraints of memory play a role (see

Rubin 1997). Mnemonic techniques of specialists, and especially the introduction of writing, make it possible to store and to transmit radically counter-intuitive ideas that in spontaneous, ordinary transmission would either be lost or transformed into a simpler form (see Sperber 1996:74; Pyysiäinen 1999). This line of reasoning has the consequence that, as long as the Buddhist tradition was transmitted orally, the Buddha must have been represented in simpler ways than what is the case in the later, written sources. He was not necessarily represented by employing purely intuitive concepts; all that can be predicted is that his counter-intuitive properties (if such there were) were simple. So, one reason for why the later texts picture the Buddha in more radically counter-intuitive terms is that earlier, in the oral transmission of the tradition, this was not yet possible.

Buddha, God, and religion

The category of counter-intuitive agents is wide and varied. Gods are only one example of counter-intuitive beings. To the extent that it is at all possible to form a coherent category of gods, I suggest that gods play the role of “interested parties” in human social life (Boyer 2001:189). They know and understand everything that humans do and think, are interested in it, and also are believed to intervene in human activities, punishing and rewarding us according to our deeds. They thus are like any person with power, except for the fact that they have counter-intuitive properties. Besides, representations of gods are used in conceptualizing and explaining such human knowledge, dispositions, and preferences, which are otherwise difficult to understand. Our moral knowledge, for example, partly consists of panhuman preferences and inclinations encoded in our minds in evolution. It is, however, cognitively easier for us to consider our moral intuitions as someone’s viewpoint; this someone is a god. Ascribing moral ideas to a divine mind both explains these ideas (their existence and their binding nature) and makes it easier for us to process moral knowledge in the mind (see Boyer 2001:169–202; Pyysiäinen 2001:158–193).

As Boyer (2001:170–174) points out, the relationship between religion and morality can be understood in three complementary ways: besides the interested party model, morality can also be conceived of as sets of commands laid down by the gods, or as based on the example of exemplary beings, be they *bodhisattvas* or saints. In practice, it is the interested party model that is most widely employed. What is true of morality also holds for many other aspects of social life; gods are an inevitable part of it. Various aspects of the social life are understood, explained, and mentally represented by employing the ideas of gods (see Boyer 2001; cf. Durkheim 1965). By reconceptualizing gods as “counter-intuitive agents,” we arrive at a precise, theoretically motivated, and empirically testable concept. In this view, religion is typified by the presence of representations (mental and public) of counter-intuitive agents, which are taken seriously by the group in question and are used in the organization of social life as well as in personal life management. Here I have not, however, been concerned with a detailed explication of this idea (see Pyysiäinen 2001; 2002a); instead, I have only wanted to show that the Buddha and the buddhas most clearly belong to the category of counter-intuitive beings, and that Buddhism thus need not be problematic with regard to a global concept of religion, not even when only considered in the light of its written sources.

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ARYENS ET SÉMITES : QUEL AVENIR? ARCHÉOLOGIES, LANGUES ET VISIONS DU MONDE

PAUL-LOUIS VAN BERG

Summary

Friedrich Max Mueller thought that the “absurdity” of Aryan myths could be explained by a “disease of language,” that is a shift implying that metaphor was taken for reality. Thus, cosmic and meteorological phenomena came to be considered as human beings living human adventures. He found the etiology of this disease in language, and specially in the polysemy and ambiguity of Vedic Sanskrit which he opposed to the limpidity of Hebrew. While the difference between the two languages does exist, the explanation has long been acknowledged to be false.

Actually, the opposition becomes understandable if we consider that Indo-Europeans and Semites belong to much wider cultural basins. Indeed, characteristics attributed by Max Mueller to the Aryans also belong to the Altaic cultures, while those assigned to the Semites are shared not only by Hebrews, but also by many other Semitic and by non-Semitic cultures of the Near East. Hence, we can define two large cultural sets north and south of the Black Sea and the Caucasus.

In the northern one, Indo-European and Altaic cultures share many traits: organization of space and time, society and knowledge, unreliability of the visible world, conception of the human body, rejection of figuration, for instance. In the southern one, we find radically different conceptions shared by the indigenous Near Eastern cultures.

Considering that linguistic communication and ways of thinking are only aspects of these two cultural sets, elaborated separately since the Neolithic and adapted to different conditions of life, we may expect mythologies to reflect these differences and understand that the opposition of Vedic Sanskrit and Hebrew is only a small facet of a global phenomenon.

La question

Aryens et Sémites sont impliqués dans une controverse culturelle, linguistique et raciste qui occupe la seconde moitié du XIX^{ème} et la première moitié du XX^{ème} siècle¹. En bref, il s’agit de savoir qui est le

¹ Olender 1989.

meilleur, qui est le plus près de Dieu. Face à Ernest Renan, sémitisant, qui voit dans les Juifs une race inférieure et leur refuse l'invention du monothéisme², Friedrich Max Müller, indo-européanisant, pense que les Aryens ont été victimes d'une maladie du langage et de la pensée qui les a amenés à obscurcir la révélation première reçue en partage par tous les hommes au moment de la création³. L'absurdité du discours mythologique des peuples aryens serait le symptôme de cette maladie qui permet à ces derniers de prendre des phénomènes cosmiques et météorologiques pour des dieux anthropomorphes vivant des aventures tout humaines. C'est d'abord dans la langue que Müller trouve l'étiologie de cette dérive⁴. Confronté à la polysémie et à l'ambiguïté du sanscrit védique, d'une part, à la « limpidité » de l'hébreu menant à une conception épurée de la divinité juive, de l'autre, il tente une explication quelque peu mécaniste.

Selon lui, la visibilité permanente de la racine hébraïque aurait empêché les glissements et dérives sémantiques propres aux langues aryennes, tandis que dans celles-ci, le jeu des affixes et des dérivations, occultant la visibilité de la racine, aurait favorisé polysémie et métaphores, génératrices d'anthropomorphisme et de mythologie. Ce dérapage serait particulièrement sensible dans la langue védique⁵.

L'explication fait aujourd'hui sourire et rappelle l'argument d'Eusèbe de Césarée qui, seize siècles plus tôt, faisait endosser l'apparente absurdité des mythes helléniques aux inventions des hiéologues et aux erreurs commises lors de la traduction d'une révélation donnée en Egypte par Tautos⁶. Pourtant, les différences sont là, linguistiques et culturelles, les langues imposant leurs contraintes à la pensée et *vice versa*. Même s'il faut tempérer quelque peu l'opposition trop radicale envisagée par Müller, les Hébreux n'étant pas totalement dépourvus de mythologie, de grandes options divergentes existent bel et bien. Les

² Renan 1859.

³ Müller 1968.

⁴ Müller 1864 ; voir aussi Müller 2002 : 583.

⁵ Müller 1968 ; Olender 1989 : 116–118.

⁶ *Praeparatio evangelica* I, 9, 25–26 et I, 10, 8.

textes bibliques suggèrent effectivement une tendance à la lisibilité directe et à l'objectivation du réel, tandis que les hymnes védiques illustrent un amour certain de l'opacité, n'ont cure de réalité immédiate et relèvent d'une tradition poétique exploitant volontiers les possibilités de la langue pour nouer de multiples régions du visible et de l'invisible, tout en passant à l'occasion des messages codés. *Veda* et *Ancien Testament* ne reflètent ni les mêmes intentions ni la même vision du monde.

Qui plus est, ces deux ensembles littéraires sont issus d'univers culturels distincts. Or, les langues ne sont qu'un aspect des cultures parmi d'autres. Lorsqu'elles ne sont pas imposées brutalement de l'extérieur, les langues, les formes de la vie en société et les façons de penser se développent ensemble, en interaction permanente, même si ce n'est pas nécessairement au même rythme. Il n'est donc pas question de donner la priorité à l'un ou à l'autre de ces facteurs. Pour comprendre des différences, apparues d'abord aux philologues, nous voici donc autorisés à faire le détour par les cultures, leurs textes et leurs archéologies. On voit alors que la « dérive » observée par Muel-ler appartient non seulement à la plupart des cultures indo-européennes connues, mais que bien des traits qui caractérisent le monde indo-européen archaïque (organisation de l'espace et de la société, structuration du savoir, rapport au corps et à l'image, méfiance à l'égard du visible, mode d'ancrage dans le temps, par exemple) se retrouvent dans la pensée des populations de langue altaïque qui nomadisèrent dans les steppes d'Eurasie⁷. Par ailleurs, la clarté et l'univocité ne sont pas propres au seul texte biblique, mais caractérisent, à quelques détails près, l'ensemble des autres langues indigènes anciennes de la Méditerranée orientale et du Proche-Orient, pratiquement inconnues dans les années 1860 et reflétant des cultures moins pauvres en mythologie que celle des Hébreux. L'opposition distinguée par Max Müller apparaît dès lors comme un cas particulier d'un phénomène global : au nord et au sud de la mer Noire, du Caucase et des monts de Turkménie

⁷ Roux 1984 : 205–206.

s'étendent deux immenses bassins culturels dont les différences restent à expliquer.

L'archéologie confirme l'existence de différences culturelles séparant le Nord du Sud, depuis la fin du Paléolithique supérieur au moins, et montre qu'elles s'accroissent encore avec l'avènement de la vie paysanne au Levant et sa diffusion vers les zones cultivables de l'Europe et de l'Asie méridionale⁸. Ces deux bassins ne furent pourtant pas hermétiquement clos tout au long de leur histoire et il se peut, par exemple, qu'entre le 7^e et 4^e millénaire des interactions régionales aient contribué au façonnage des cultures indo-européennes dans la steppe⁹. Dans la suite, malgré les métissages advenus lorsque ces dernières se répandirent dans le Sud, le diagnostic différentiel global se lira encore, en surface ou en palimpseste, souvent jusqu'à nos jours.

Proche-Orient

Dans tout le Proche-Orient, l'espace agricole, domestique, villageois, palatial et urbain est régi par des axes perpendiculaires : d'Uruk à Assur ou Ebla et de Suse à Jérusalem, le quadrillage est omniprésent, du Néolithique à la fin de l'Antiquité. Pour le reste, c'est la Mésopotamie qui illustre le mieux la tendance culturelle dans la mesure où elle fournit la documentation la plus complète et où elle a influencé toutes les cultures de la région. Dès le 3^{ème} millénaire, le temple peut y dominer une pyramide à base carrée, image d'une société humaine et divine fortement hiérarchisée où il importe que chacun occupe sa place à l'échelon qui lui est assigné. Au sommet, le roi détient tous les pouvoirs. Il devient rapidement maître de tout l'espace accessible, comme le dieu Enki, qui s'affirme « comptable du ciel et de la terre »¹⁰ ou comme Enlil dont les textes assurent que « ce qu'il décide est imprescriptible » et que « ses yeux scrutent la terre entière »¹¹.

⁸ Berg 1997 ; Berg 2000.

⁹ Recherche en cours par le dr Marc Vander Linden, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Centre de Recherche interfacultaire « Espaces et Sociétés – approches comparatives ».

¹⁰ Bottéro 1987 : 284–286 ; Bottéro et Kramer 1989 : 165–188.

¹¹ Bottéro 1987 : 252–253 ; Bottéro 1998 : 78.

Cette recherche d'une maîtrise globale de l'espace transparait également, par frises et pavages, dans les arts « décoratifs » appliqués sur les murs, les poteries ou, à certaines époques, sur les cylindres-sceaux. Des figures géométriques, anthropomorphes et zoomorphes y sont répétées à l'identique dans toutes les cases d'une grille réelle ou virtuelle. Cette invention du Natoufien s'est généralisée dès les premiers temps du Néolithique à poterie, au début du 7^e millénaire, instituant un mode d'organisation de l'espace propre à la tradition proche-orientale et qui n'est guère attesté dans les autres courants du Néolithique européen¹².

Mais qui dit contrôle et hiérarchie dit aussi ordonnance et classement. L'invention de l'écriture à Uruk, aux alentours de 3300, ne se conçoit que dans le cadre de cette organisation spatiale particulière. Écrire en logogrammes ou en signes syllabiques requiert en effet des arts figuratifs et géométriques, la maîtrise de la schématisation, l'habitude de reproduire la même figure à l'identique pour assurer la standardisation des signes et, dans la mesure du possible, une relation univoque du signe avec son référent objectal ou phonétique. Il faut aussi que la figure se distingue aisément du fond, pratiquer la décomposition d'êtres ou d'objets en leurs parties et intégrer celles-ci dans le répertoire graphique, manipuler la synecdoque et la métonymie. Enfin, il faut occuper l'espace de manière structurée, pour pouvoir inférer à peu de frais le sens de la lecture. On y ajoutera des jeux combinatoires en tout genre permettant de faire varier le sens des mots ou de désigner des concepts qui ne sont pas représentables¹³. Cette innovation géniale, destinée aux inventaires et à la comptabilité, fut bientôt suivie par l'établissement de listes lexicographiques. Ces listes de noms de divinités, de titres officiels, de métiers, d'animaux, de plantes et bien d'autres, découpent le réel en autant de catégories distinctes, car le même mot n'apparaît pas dans deux listes différentes¹⁴. Elles furent utilisées pendant trois millénaires, non seulement pour l'enseignement

¹² Berg 1997.

¹³ Glassner 2000.

¹⁴ Goody 1979 : 176.

de l'écriture, mais aussi pour transmettre un classement encyclopédique des objets du monde. Enfin, dans la pensée mésopotamienne, le nom prononcé ou écrit n'étant qu'un aspect particulier de l'objet qu'il désigne¹⁵, la parole comme l'écriture ne peuvent exprimer qu'une réalité objective. Cette option métaphysique condamne par avance toute dérive métaphorique. L'habileté des scribes à s'exprimer avec clarté s'inscrit dans le même ordre d'idée.

Cette objectivité du monde, associée aux listes et autres méthodes issues de la comptabilité, est aussi la condition du développement des sciences mésopotamiennes, toujours basées sur des observations répétées. Les traités de mathématiques, d'astronomie ou de médecine sont avant tout de longues énumérations d'observations et de cas de figure classés par genre. Il en va de même pour la mantique : les dieux ont « écrit » le monde à la manière d'une tablette d'argile¹⁶ et qui sait lire les phénomènes naturels peut aussi y déchiffrer la volonté divine. Listes interminables de propositions du type « si . . . , alors . . . », les traités de divination déductive montrent qu'il ne s'agit pas seulement d'inventorier les phénomènes naturels, mais aussi de s'assurer la maîtrise d'un espace sans extérieur par la prise en compte de cas imaginaires et bien souvent impossibles¹⁷. Les exorcismes, adressés à de longues séries de démons ou les malédictions, avec leur énumération détaillée de tous les individus concernés, témoignent du même désir d'épuisement des possibilités¹⁸.

Quadrillage, maîtrise, classement, exhaustion : ces quatre termes clés des cultures de la Mésopotamie historique imprègnent non seulement l'organisation de l'espace et de la société ou la comptabilité des dieux et des hommes, mais aussi les arts et les sciences. Comme l'organisation de la société, cette pensée scientifique présuppose un ordre des choses idéalement stable et permanent. Les dieux ont créé le monde

¹⁵ Bottéro 1987 : 127.

¹⁶ Bottéro 1987 : 130.

¹⁷ Bottéro 1974 : 169–171.

¹⁸ Lackenbacher 1990 : 162–163 ; voir aussi Seux 1976 : 403–405 ; Bottéro 1998 370–381.

une fois pour toutes, aux hommes de le maintenir ou de le rétablir en l'état.

Cette exigence d'identité à soi et d'intégrité n'est pas réservée aux figures géométriques, aux signes de l'écriture ou au monde : elle s'étend aussi au corps des divinités, des vivants et des morts. Anthropomorphes, les dieux sont munis de formes stables et d'une beauté surhumaine. La métamorphose, si commune dans bien des univers culturels, est exceptionnelle¹⁹. Quant aux hommes, que les mythes assimilent à des images créées par les dieux, faites d'argile mêlée de sang divin²⁰, leur intégrité corporelle et mentale est indispensable à leur bonne intégration sociale²¹. Toute malformation ou handicap entraîne la marginalisation ou l'exclusion de l'individu concerné, car il représente un danger potentiel pour le corps social²². Aussi, comme on pouvait s'y attendre, la naissance d'un enfant mal formé présage-t-elle une catastrophe²³. En conséquence, le tatouage n'est guère plus pratiqué que l'automutilation. De même, l'intégrité du squelette est une condition d'accès au séjour souterrain des défunts. Hormis de rares cas de destruction volontaire²⁴, la Mésopotamie ne pratique guère la manipulation des ossements.

Les mêmes exigences d'intégrité sont bien entendu reportées sur les représentations divines, humaines et démoniaques, couramment animées et intimement liées à l'être qu'elles représentent. Les statues de culte sont habitées chacune par une divinité²⁵. Telles statues royales intercèdent en permanence auprès des dieux pour les peuples concernés et telles statues d'orant prient éternellement pour ceux qui les ont dédiées. Quant aux démons et aux hybrides, hors humanité et constitués de parties de corps empruntées à des espèces différentes, ils sont

¹⁹ Bottéro 1992 : 126–127 ; Bottéro et Kramer 1989 : 331–337.

²⁰ Bottéro et Kramer 1989 : 509, 536–337, 636–640.

²¹ Cassin 1987 : 72–95.

²² Lackenbacher 1990 : 162–163.

²³ Bottéro 1974 : 106–107.

²⁴ Cassin 1987 : 248–257.

²⁵ Bottéro 1987 : 256 ; Bottéro 1998 : 138–141.

néanmoins conformes à la logique anatomique des vertébrés : têtes, membres, ailes et queues s'y articulent à la place attendue. On ne s'éloigne guère du projet divin qui garantit en quelque sorte l'objectivité du monde. Dans un tel cadre idéologique, les artistes mésopotamiens ne devaient pas s'écarter d'un réalisme de convention.

Enfin, la maîtrise concrète de l'espace, et l'approche objective du monde qu'elle suppose, sont complétées par un écoulement régulier du temps depuis les origines. Mise en place d'un calendrier, tenue d'annales et de chroniques, stèles de victoire, inscriptions royales et reliefs commémoratifs assurent toujours davantage l'ancrage dans un temps linéaire, complémentaire de l'occupation ordonnée de l'espace²⁶.

L'Europe et la steppe

Malgré sa longue histoire émaillée de péripéties diverses, le bassin culturel septentrional s'oppose au précédent par une série de traits persistants. Il comprend les cultures qui s'expriment en langues indo-européennes et, au plus tard à partir du 1^{er} millénaire avant notre ère, les cultures de langue altaïque installées dans la steppe. A date ancienne, les cultures matérielles des unes et des autres ne sont guère discernables²⁷. Ma connaissance des cultures de langue ouralienne est actuellement trop pauvre pour que j'aie pu les intégrer à cette enquête.

Il serait trop aisé et incorrect d'opposer à l'espace des sédentaires du Proche-Orient celui des nomades pastoraux du Nord. Il n'empêche que les villes sont partout tardives et que le quadrillage de l'espace n'est jamais le maître mot, sinon dans les régions où, comme en Grèce²⁸, en Italie ou en Iran, les cultures de langue indo-européenne se sont approprié une part importante du bagage culturel méridional. Au lieu d'une organisation pyramidale de la société, nous trouvons un modèle social qu'on représenterait volontiers par des cercles concentriques²⁹. Toutes les populations concernées se caractérisent par une mobilité

²⁶ Glassner 1993.

²⁷ Roux 1984 : 21–23.

²⁸ Vander Linden 2000 ; Berg, Vander Linden et Cauwe 2000.

²⁹ Benveniste 1969 : 293–319 ; Sergent 1995 : 189–193.

impressionnante ; le panorama politique se modifie en permanence par le jeu des alliances et du devoir de vengeance et il ne peut être question d'imaginer une intégration politique comparable à celle de la Mésopotamie. Même les dieux, qui disposent pourtant de la toute puissance, ne peuvent commander l'impensable. Et de fait, les grands fondateurs d'empire des temps historiques, Cyrus, Alexandre, César, Charlemagne ou Gengis Khan, s'appuient tous sur des modèles politiques d'origine méridionale.

Dans la steppe comme dans toute l'Eurasie septentrionale depuis le 14^{ème} millénaire, l'ornementation des poteries est basée sur une structure en bandes horizontales : un petit motif (impression, incision) est répété autour du vase sans le compter, tandis que les grandes figures géométriques du Proche-Orient sont inconnues dans les zones qui n'ont pas subi d'influence méridionale³⁰. L'ubiquité de cette pratique dans le Nord suffit à dénoncer une approche de l'espace différente de celle du Sud. Il ne s'agit pas ici de mettre en place une grille, mais de définir des zones parallèles, juxtaposées ou empilées.

Toutes les cultures septentrionales archaïques sont orales, attachées à cette oralité qui permet à la parole de rester adaptable aux circonstances et tendent à rejeter ou à minimiser l'emploi de l'écriture³¹. Si nous savons peu de choses des sciences de la nature, il reste qu'une grande partie de la médecine est de nature magique³² et que, loin de reposer sur des observations réitérées, la divination paraît souvent inductive et inspirée³³.

Les poètes indo-européens en particulier, spécialistes de variantes sophistiquées de la communication³⁴, dites parfois « langue des dieux » (Inde, Grèce, Scandinavie), se plaisent à monter une poésie difficile

³⁰ Berg 1997.

³¹ Sergent 1995 : 386–388.

³² Gonda 1962 : 135–142 ; Guyonvarc'h 1997 : 223–270 ; Griffiths 1996 : 58–68 ; Boyer 1986 : 83–86 ; Sergent 1995 : 243–244.

³³ Guyonvarc'h 1997 : 271–322 ; Boyer 1986 : 89–97 ; Boyer 1978 : 135–139 ; Griffiths 1996 : 129–145.

³⁴ Sergent 1995 : 388–390.

dont la langue bouscule l'ordre des mots et joue des ambiguïtés possibles de la syntaxe. L'emploi des métaphores et des expressions énigmatiques ouvre généralement plusieurs niveaux de lecture et fait courir sous les apparences un sens caché réservé aux élites, mise en scène particulière d'une défiance à l'égard du visible dont nous aurons à reparler. La langue des rishis védiques fut travaillée dans ce sens, comme celle des druides celtes et des scaldes scandinaves³⁵. Les œuvres d'Homère et d'Hésiode³⁶, ainsi que certains *Hymnes homériques* appartiennent encore à la même tradition culturelle³⁷. Dans ce monde où les traditions orales sont vivaces, est instruit et intelligent qui se montre apte à comprendre au delà des mots ou à tendre des liens entre des parties de l'univers apparemment séparées. La polysémie et les glissements sémantiques n'y relèvent donc pas d'une dérive linguistique ou d'une dégénérescence de la pensée, mais d'orientations culturelles surdéterminées dans leurs élaborations les plus complexes par des recherches délibérées. De même, nombre de récits mythologiques dont le sens nous échappe exigent un décodage. Si Max Müller avait bien vu qu'un lien unissait certaines obscurités de la langue et certaines formes du discours mythologique, il généralisait avec trop de hâte et se trompait sur la cause. Loin de prendre des vessies pour des lanternes ou le monde pour une vache, nombre de poètes indo-européens ont volontairement dissimulé le sens profond de leurs oeuvres. Entre les mains de spécialistes, prêtres, poètes-voyants, médecins et juristes, le savoir exprime partout la défiance à l'égard du monde visible : tout élément de la nature, tout phénomène météorologique peut être l'effet d'une illusion visuelle suscitée par une divinité ou un magicien.

Indo-Européens et Altaïques anciens ignorent la forme des dieux et ne les représentent pas, même s'ils leur supposent à l'occasion une

³⁵ Renou 1978 ; Bader 1989 ; Boyer 1990 ; Campanile 1977 ; Ward 1993 ; Guyonvarc'h 1999 ; Watkins 2001.

³⁶ Bader 1989.

³⁷ Berg 2001.

forme humaine³⁸. En ce cas, le corps divin est beau, mais son intégrité est loin d'être universellement requise et certains panthéons intègrent volontiers borgnes (Odin), manchots (Tyr) ou pieds-bots (Héphaïstos). Comme le notait Müller, bon nombre de divinités telles qu'Ouranos, Surya ou l'Aurore sont autant d'éléments cosmiques dotés de surcroît d'une personnalité humaine. Mais cette double nature, loin d'être issue de métaphores dont les origines furent plus ou moins oubliées, me paraît plutôt conserver le souvenir d'un temps où, comme dans les cultures altaïques, toute la nature était animée³⁹. Du côté des vivants, l'idéal guerrier commun à toutes les cultures indo-européennes et altaïques anciennes se serait mal accommodé d'une exigence d'intégrité du corps. D'ailleurs, les textes d'Hérodote ou les momies d'Asie centrale attestent la pratique régionale du tatouage. La forme humaine elle-même est instable et s'échange à l'occasion contre une autre empruntée à un animal ou à un objet inerte. A témoin les milliers de récits de métamorphose des répertoires indiens⁴⁰, grecs, latins, celtes⁴¹, germaniques⁴² ou kirghizes⁴³. Par l'effet de la magie ou de la métempsycose, un corps peut toujours cacher une âme de nature différente : de la Grèce à l'Altaï, les chevaux du héros le conseillent et pleurent sa fin prochaine⁴⁴. On voit comment, dans ces conditions, la pensée même

³⁸ Sergent 1995 : 392.

³⁹ Roux 1984 : 205.

⁴⁰ Renou 1978 : 133–140 (sur les origines de la notion de *mâyâ* dans la spéculation indienne).

⁴¹ Guyonvarc'h 1997 : 323–330 (sur la métamorphose).

⁴² Boyer 1986 : 39–50.

⁴³ *Les portes de feutre : Épopées kirghiz et sagai, Sibérie du sud*, textes recueillis par Wilhelm Radloff, Paris : Gallimard, coll. 'L'aube des peuples' 1999, ou encore *Aventures merveilleuses sous terre et ailleurs de Er-Töshtük le géant des steppes : Épopée du cycle de Manas*, traduit du kirghiz par Pertev Boratav, Paris : Gallimard, coll. 'Caucase' 1965.

⁴⁴ Roux 1984 : 207 ; *Le Livre de Dede Korkut : Récit de la Geste oghuz*, traduit du turc et présenté par Louis Bazin et Altan Gokalp, Paris : Gallimard, coll. 'L'aube des peuples' 1998 ; *Aventures merveilleuses sous terre et ailleurs de Er-Töshtük le géant des steppes*.

d'un monde phénoménal objectif et entièrement descriptible eut été à mille lieues du sens commun.

Le destin des cadavres est variable et l'intégrité du squelette ne semble pas être une condition nécessaire de la réception au séjour des morts. Si, dans un premier temps, l'existence de cultes d'ancêtres semble partout attestée dans la steppe et ailleurs, au premier chef par l'érection d'un tumulus au-dessus de la tombe dès la fin du 4^{ème} millénaire, ce culte et le destin du cadavre varient dans le temps et l'espace selon l'évolution propre de chaque société et les rapports de force qu'elle institue entre dieux et les défunts. Iraniens orientaux et Indiens finiront par se débarrasser complètement et définitivement des corps, tandis qu'à partir du 2^{ème} millénaire, les Occidentaux passeront à maintes reprises de l'inhumation à la crémation et inversement.

Le polymorphisme des dieux et des hommes ne favorisait guère la représentation, sans doute ressentie comme réductrice. Les traditions de l'Eurasie septentrionale ignorent largement les statues de culte autant que les temples. Dans les cultures indo-européennes, l'image est toujours récente et empruntée à la Méditerranée (Grecs, Latins), au Proche-Orient (Hittites, Iraniens) ou à la Chine (une partie des Scythes), voire au monde ouralien si on s'accorde à assigner une appartenance linguistique indo-européenne aux communautés scandinaves de l'âge du Bronze. A la différence du cas des Hittites, des Grecs et des Romains, lorsque l'impact méridional n'a pas été trop important, la figuration est adaptée à la culture d'accueil. Ainsi en est-il au Luristan, chez une partie des Scythes et de leurs successeurs dans la steppe (Sauromates, Sarmates), chez les Gètes et les Daces, les Celtes et les Germains, chez qui le respect de la logique anatomique n'est nullement imposé, tandis que figuration et arts géométriques se mélangent dans des proportions variables, le symbole l'emportant sur l'icône. Les Celtes laténiens et les Vikings semblent, en outre, avoir fait de l'art ce que leurs poètes-voyants faisaient du langage, soit des images complexes, à plusieurs niveaux de lecture, réservées à une élite, munissant ainsi les cadeaux royaux du prestige de la « langue des dieux ».⁴⁵ Sans

⁴⁵ Berg (sous presse).

doute est-ce dans le même esprit qu'il nous faut comprendre l'inquiétante étrangeté des compositions monumentales de la Valcamonica et des stèles guerrières du Haut-Adige (fin du 4^{ème} et 3^{ème} millénaire)⁴⁶, du décor de la Céramique Transcaucasienne⁴⁷ (3^{ème} millénaire) ou des figurines funéraires de la culture de Cîrna, dans la région des Portes de Fer du Danube (milieu du 2^{ème} millénaire)⁴⁸.

Enfin, les vieilles cultures septentrionales semblent toutes rebelles à une histoire événementielle liée au comput du temps. Mythes et épopées confiés à la mémoire occupant ici la place des annales et des chroniques orientales. L'Inde brahmanique s'est aventurée plus loin encore, en limitant le culte des ancêtres à trois générations et en affirmant, par une inversion des valeurs traditionnelles, que l'oubli du mort doit l'emporter sur le souvenir, tandis que la construction d'un tombeau spectaculaire ne ferait que magnifier le péché du défunt⁴⁹. Dans bien des cultures, le temps peut être aussi labile que l'espace : dieux et magiciens le manipulent à volonté, le dilatent ou le condensent selon les besoins de la cause⁵⁰.

Conclusion

De l'examen qui précède, il ressort que les cultures ne se donnent pas seulement les idéologies mais plus généralement les outils intellectuels dont elles ont besoin. Dès le 3^{ème} millénaire, installées définitivement dans un monde qu'elles souhaitent immobile, rivées au sol par leurs temples, leurs propriétés terriennes et les tombes de leurs ancêtres, anthropocentriques et encadrées dans un système verrouillé de toute part, les civilisations mésopotamiennes et la plupart des autres cultures indigènes du Proche-Orient peuvent s'offrir le luxe de penser, de peser et de comptabiliser en toute exactitude, de définir par la négation, de séparer, classer et ordonner les aspects du monde. L'élabo-

⁴⁶ Berg et Cauwe 1995.

⁴⁷ Berg 2002.

⁴⁸ Voir note 46.

⁴⁹ Malamoud 2002 : 67–90.

⁵⁰ Guyonvarc'h 1997 : 43–45.

ration de leurs langues savantes s'en ressent dans l'univocité du vocabulaire, la simplicité relative de la grammaire, la régularité de la morphologie et la clarté de l'énonciation.

Dans le monde instable, mobile et fluctuant du Nord, on a bien du mal à savoir de quoi demain sera fait. L'ordre proche-oriental y est impossible et impensable, autant que la précision du concept, du calcul et de l'observation répétée. Les relations entre les groupes sociaux se pensent sur une base régionale, en étoile ou en réseau, et non sous la forme du quadrillage ou de la pyramide. Il en va de même dans la vie intellectuelle. Les formes culturelles de l'habileté et de l'intelligence s'illustrent dans la capacité à saisir le moment adéquat à l'action et, partant d'un point, à ourdir des liens en tout sens entre les multiples aspects du visible et de l'imaginaire. Les langues élitistes des poètes reflètent bien cette vision des choses dans leurs complexités, leurs irrégularités, leurs polysémies, leurs ambiguïtés, leurs métaphores à tiroir et leurs jeux d'énigmes. Plus incertaines et mouvantes qu'en Eurasie méridionale, les conditions de la vie requièrent des manières de penser plus souples, plus adaptables aux circonstances, dotées d'un plus grand pouvoir de gestion du changement, incompatibles avec l'objectivité phénoménale et la logique de la non-contradiction.

Il va de soi que les modèles globalisants proposés ici demandent à être affinés, y compris leurs variations dans le temps et l'espace. On leur reprochera volontiers leur manque de consistance historique. Cependant, je pense qu'ils rendent bien les différences de mentalité et d'ambiance intellectuelle qui opposent le Nord et le Sud. En ce sens, ils constituent un outil heuristique, non seulement pour évaluer les cultures historiques, mais aussi pour tester l'appartenance à l'un ou l'autre des deux mondes en question des cultures qui ne sont connues que par l'archéologie.

Pour en revenir à Max Müller, nous pouvons non seulement substituer une option culturelle à une maladie du langage ou à une dérive de la pensée, mais nous voyons que l'opposition, authentique celle-ci, des langues littéraires hébraïque et védique ne prend son sens que dans un contexte bien plus vaste. La question de la supériorité des uns ou des autres y est vide de sens. Enfin, l'étude des cultures de langue

indo-européenne perd sans doute beaucoup à se préoccuper si peu des cultures altaïques d'Asie centrale : des textes tels que l'*Histoire secrète des Mongols*⁵¹, le *Livre de Dede Korkut* ou les épopées kirghiz et sagai⁵² livrent à chaque page de beaux exemples de proximité avec les façons de vivre et de penser des Indo-Européens. Que ces ressemblances soient génétiques ou liées à des phénomènes aréaux ne change pas grand-chose à l'affaire, soit que les Altaïques aient repris aux Indo-Européens ce qui pouvait les intéresser, soit qu'il s'agisse d'Indo-Européens « turquisés », ainsi que le furent peut-être les Kirghizes⁵³. Par ailleurs, on comprend mal les productions des Hébreux sans prendre en compte l'ensemble des cultures proche-orientales et, au premier chef, les textes sumériens, akkadiens, ougaritiques, phéniciens, *etc.*, de même que l'ensemble des cultures archéologiques depuis le premier Néolithique. Il est sans doute temps de remettre Aryens et Sémites à leur place.

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⁵² Voir note 43.

⁵³ Roux 1984 : 22.

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DID THE HINDUS LACK A SENSE OF HISTORY?

ARVIND SHARMA

Summary

The view that the Hindus do not possess a sense of history has become so commonplace as to virtually achieve the status of an axiom in the study of Indic religion and culture. It is the argument of this paper that this view may stand in need of revision in the light of the epigraphic, literary, and even artistic evidence presented therein, specially when it is assessed in the context of the various foreign invasions to which India has been subject.

The view that Hinduism as a religion, or the Hindus as a people, lack a sense of history has been expressed so often as to have become a cliché (Basham 1975:54; Pitt 1958:20; McCrindle 1960:10; Ghosal 1965:1).¹ Even when scholars have tried to take a more sophisticated as opposed to a clichéd view, the effect has often been to reinforce it. Professor A.L. Basham, for instance, would concede to the Hindus a sense of the past, but still not of history (1999:44). Elsewhere he allows for a sense of antiquity, if only to suggest that Hinduism possessed an exaggerated sense of it (Basham 1999:4), while some have argued that Hinduism possessed a sense of historical pessimism but, again, not of history (Klostermaier 1994:117).

Even when scholars take a more nuanced view and distinguish between: (1) lack of chronology (Pitt 1958:20), (2) lack of history (McCrindle 1960:109; Aiyangar 1941:145; Mill 1975:35), (3) lack of sense of history (Aiyangar 1941:416), (4) lack of historiography (Majumdar 1952:47–51), and (5) the lack of a theory of history (Asthana 1992:20), the net effect is the same. The alleged lack of historiography and a theory of history in India only buttresses the

¹ No less than over sixty references to this effect can be documented.

previous claim of a lack of a sense of history, while its abundant history makes the lack of a sense of it only stand out more starkly.

Similarly, when Hinduism is compared to other religions of Indian origin, such as Buddhism, Jainism or Sikhism, it suffers by this comparison, in the sense that these latter religions are usually represented as being endowed, at least relatively to Hinduism, with a greater or better sense of history. It is then noted that the *Mahāvamśa* and the *Dīpavamśa* record the history of Buddhism in Śrī Lankā (Basham 1964:46); the death of Lord Mahāvīra initiates a historical era in Jainism (Jaini 1979:37–38) and not only is Sikhism's history relatively recent and well documented (Singh 1966; Embree 1988:493), a sense of history within it is also manifest (Cole and Sambhi 1998:8).

The aim of this paper is to examine the thesis that Hindus lacked a sense of history on the basis of the evidence on this point available to us from ancient and, at times, medieval India. Out of the five senses in which the claim that the Hindus lacked a sense of history, namely as indicating a lack of chronology, history, “sense” of history, historiography and theory of history, can be made, this paper will focus on only one understanding of it, namely, the lack of historical sense. This is not to deny that all the five dimensions are interconnected and mutually relevant. Indeed they will all be engaged but only as they bear on the presence or absence of a “sense” of history. As each of the five senses could constitute the theme of a paper by itself, we wish to place the issue of the absence or presence of a historical sense centrestage, in order to make our undertaking more precise and the outcome more definite. It might be useful to specify what we mean by “sense” of history or “historical sense” before we proceed further. In this matter, we shall follow the lead provided by Romila Thapar. She writes (1978:268):

Since much of the argument hinges on the definition of a sense of history, let me begin by suggesting a definition. A sense of history can be defined as a consciousness of past events, which events are relevant to a particular society, seen in a chronological framework and expressed in a form which meets the needs of that society. It may be argued that this is too restricted a definition and that history implies a concern with political events and, in addition, involves

the analysis of past events by suggesting causal relationships based on rational explanation and which, therefore, assumes a critical judgement on the past by the historian. It is, however, debatable whether this extension of the definition of an historical sense is not a product of modern thinking, and where such historical writing does exist in ancient cultures (as indeed it does even in the Indian tradition at a later period), it is not a consciously thought-out philosophy of history but the result of an individual and rather analytical mind applying itself to historical narrative.

I

The place to look for a historical sense, if any, among Hindus, one would imagine, would not so much be the religious literature of the Hindus, with the Brāhmaṇas acting as its custodians and maintaining it through oral transmission. For if Hinduism does not attach the same theological or teleological value to history as the Abrahamic religions and secular Western culture are wont to, then this is obviously not the most promising place to look for it. One should instead turn to the records left behind by those who made history in India as elsewhere: the rulers:

The favoured medium in which the rulers of India left behind their records are inscriptions. About 90.000 inscriptions have so far been discovered in different parts of India, out of which the largest numbers come from the Tamil-, Kannada-, and Telegu-speaking areas — about 35.000, 17.000 and 10.000 respectively. Many of these inscriptions have not yet been published. Every year new inscriptions are being discovered and studied, and our knowledge of early Indian history is being gradually widened. . . . The popular belief that all important inscriptions have already been discovered, studied and utilised for the reconstruction of history is wrong. . . (Sircar 1977:91)

Whether the Hindus did or did not possess a sense of history — or geography for that matter, will then have to be determined by an examination of these inscriptions.

The importance of these inscriptions in the reconstruction of ancient Indian history has been recognized for over a century now, if not longer. Vincent A. Smith writes:

Inscriptions have been given the first place in the list because they are, on the whole, the most important and trustworthy source of our knowledge. Unfortu-

nately, they do not at present go further back than the third century BC with certainty, although it is not unlikely that records considerably earlier may be discovered, and it is possible that a very few known documents may go back beyond the reign of Aśoka. Indian inscriptions, which usually are incised on either stone or metal, may be either official documents set forth by kings or other authorities, or records made by private persons for various purposes. Most of the inscriptions on stone either commemorate particular events or record the dedication of buildings or images. The commemorative documents range from the simple signature of a pilgrim to long and elaborate Sanskrit poems detailing the achievements of victorious kings. Such poems are called *praśasti*. The inscriptions on metal are for the most part grants of land inscribed on plates of copper. They are sometimes extremely long, especially in the south, and usually include information about the reigning king and his ancestors. Exact knowledge of the dates of events in early Hindu history, so far as it has been attained, rests chiefly on the testimony of inscriptions. (Smith 1923:xvi–xvii)²

Notwithstanding this tribute, epigraphic evidence on the question of the sense of history as found among the Hindus does suffer from certain limitations. As already noted in the passage just cited, very few known documents go back beyond the reign of Aśoka, that is, beyond the third century BC. They are often dated in the regnal year of the king, and when obviously not so, the era is not specified. Moreover, their distribution over the country is not even, although the fact that they relatively abound in those areas where Islamic rule took longest to penetrate invites the proposition that they may also have suffered iconoclastic destruction, in keeping with the pattern of the relative paucity of such evidence from the Hindu period available from areas under prolonged Islamic rule (Spear 1994:15). The stylistic formalism of epigraphic commemorative literature (*stuti*) may also at times compromise factual and geographical exactitude, or even truth (Sircar 1971a:1–2). Nevertheless, despite these handicaps, they remain a rich resource for assessing a sense of history among the Hindus. A review of two of such well-known inscriptions: the Junagadh Inscription of Rudradāman (c. 190 AD) and the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (c. 350 AD) might be helpful in this connection.

² The passage has been retained intact in Spear 1994:13.

The Junagadh inscription of Rudradāman, which is “among the earliest dated records of ancient India, and proves that Rudradāman was reigning in AD 150” (Basham 1999:62), records the repair of a lake called Sudarśana, which had burst under the impact of a violent storm. It is dated in the year 72, thus indicating a sense of chronology, although no era is specified. It is usually taken to represent the Śaka era, which places it c. 150 AD. Then the history of the construction of the dam is mentioned: as originally constructed under the orders of Vaiśya Puṣyagupta, who was the provincial governor of the region in which the dam is located, namely Saurāṣṭra, in the time of Candragupta Maurya. These names are stated as such in the epigraph and are not being inferred. It is then recorded that the facilities were upgraded and the conduits for irrigation provided by Yuvanarāja Tushāspa, the governor of the same province during the time of Aśoka. Thus the succession of the kings of the Mauryan dynasty is correctly stated. The ancestry of Rudradāman himself is specified with such precision that it has helped resolve debates: it is stated that the inscription was incised “In the 52nd year, in reign of Rudradāman, son of Jayadāman, *grandson* of Chasṭana and *great-grandson* of Yśāmotika” (Raychaudhuri 1999:431). It goes on to say that in Rudradāman’s time it was seriously damaged by a storm and repaired again by Rudradāman’s orders. Apart from these details, several other aspects of the inscription demand attention for the historical sense implicit in them. The inscription describes Rudradāman as resorted to by all the “castes” and chosen as their lord to protect them (*sarva-varṇa-abhigamya-rakṣaṇārtham patitve vrtena*) (Banerjea 1957:282). This has been regarded as historical evidence of the election of a king in ancient India, along with that of the election of Gopāla, the founder of Pāla Dynasty in Bengal in the eighth century (Kane 1968–77, 3:30).

Another interesting aspect is provided by the claim that Rudradāman was “the restorer of kings who had been deprived of their kingdoms” (*bhraṣṭa-rāja-pratiṣṭhāpaka*) (Banerjea 1957:282; Raychaudhuri 1999:752). The inscription refers to Rudradāman defeating Śātakarṇi, Lord of the Deccan (*dakṣiṇāpatha-pati*) twice. The exact

identity of the kind remains uncertain — he has been variously identified by Rapson and B.N. Mukherjee with Vāśiṣṭhīputra Śrī Sātakarṇi, by D.R. Bhandarkar with Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi himself and by K. Gopalachari with Śiva Śrī Sātakarṇi (Banerjea 1957:282). The crucial point is that apparently the king was reinstated in the regions thus regained by defeating the Sātavāhanas. This resonates with three kinds of conquests specified in the *Arthaśāstra*: “The first is conquest in which the defeated king is forced to render homage and tribute, after which he, or a member of the family is reinstated as a vassal. The second is victory in which enormous booty is demanded and large portions of enemy territory annexed. The third involves the political annihilation of the conquered kingdom and its incorporation in that of the victor” (Basham 1999:124).

The Sanskrit terms for these are *dharmavijaya*, *lobhavijaya* and *asuravijaya* respectively. Apparently Rudradāman was following the *dharmavijaya* model but with a wrinkle. Since areas lost to the Sātavāhanas were being recovered, this was more like reconquest or *punarvijaya*: *dharmapunarvijaya*. History is here grabbing at the coattails of political theory. Such a policy is recommended by Kauṭilya (vii.161) in the *Arthaśāstra*, as well as by Yājñavalkya (i.342–343) — in a text of *dharmasāstra*. The epigraphic confirmation it receives here and partially later, indicates a general awareness of its historicity perhaps as much as its sagacity. From the point of view of the historical sense (as distinguished from the political) of the ancient Indians, it is worth noting that this epigraphic information about Rudradāman’s conquest is confirmed by an extra-Indic literary source.

In the *Geography* of Ptolemy, written about AD 140 with materials gathered a few years earlier, Ozene, i.e. Ujjayanī, capital of Avanti (west Mālwa), is mentioned as the headquarters of Tiastenes, undoubtedly a Greek corruption of the name *Chashtana*. In the Junāgarh inscription of Rudradāman, that ruler is represented as the lord of many countries including Ākara, Avanti, Anūpa, Aparānta, Saurāshṭra and Ānarta (Dvārakā region in Saurāshṭra), which had all been conquered from Gautamīputra (c. AD 106–30), probably when Rudradāman was a Kshatrapa under his grandfather. Rudradāman further claims to have twice defeated Sātakarṇi, lord of Dakṣiṇāpatha, whom he did not destroy, as he was a near relative. This Sātakarṇi seems to be no other than Gautamīputra. The close-

ness of relation between the two rulers is explained by the Kānheri inscription which refers to a Kārdamaka princess as the daughter of Mahākshatrapa Ru(dra) who is generally identified with Rudradāman, and as the wife of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Sātakarṇi, apparently a co-uterine brother of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Pulumāvi and a son of Gautamīputra. Rudradāman's claim to have reinstated deposed kings may have reference to the reinstatement of certain feudatories of Nahapāna, ousted by Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi. (Sircar 1968:183)

In the same inscription, Rudradāman speaks of defeating the Yaudheyas: "Loath to submit rendered proud as they were of having manifested their titles of heroes among all Kṣatriyas" (Banerjea 1957:282; Sanskrit text Kane 1968-77, 3:89). A.L. Basham notes (1999:97-98):

The *Mahābhārata* takes full cognisance of the existence of republican tribes in Western India, and their survival until the 5th century AD is attested by numerous coins and a few short inscriptions. Perhaps the most important western republic was that of the Yaudheyas in Northern Rājasthān, which issued numerous coins, bearing the inscription "Victory to the Yaudheya tribe"; one of their official seals has been found, with the proud legend, "Of the Yaudheyas, who possess the magic spell of victory"; and one fragmentary Yaudheya inscription survives. This mentions the chief of the tribe, whose name has unfortunately been worn away by the weathering stone; he has the regal title of mahārāja, but he is also called *mahāsenāpati*, or general-in-chief, and he is "placed at the head of the Yaudheya people."

There is a widespread impression that monarchy of the hereditary type was the main form of government in ancient India. The Junagadh inscription indicates that this common view may be in need of revision in more ways than one. Here we have an elected king celebrating his martial success against a republican martial tribe! It may make much more sense to consider the texture of ancient Indian polity as weaving the strands of monarchy and republicanism, and sometimes in surprising ways, than thinking of it as characterized by a seamless personal despotism.

The Inscription also sheds interesting light on administrative arrangements in ancient India in at least three ways. One should note that Aśoka's governor in this region was a *Yavanarāja*. This means that "foreigners" could find gainful employment in the Indian system of government, as the name Yavanarāja Tushāshpa "is of Iranian origin"

(Raychaudhuri 1999:601, 617). The Junadagh Inscription confirms this while describing the way repairs were carried out in Rudradāman's time:

Shortly before AD 150–51, a terrible cyclone caused a serious breach, as a result of which Sudarśana lake ceased to exist. When the peasants were fearing failure of the annual crops, Rudradāman sent his councillors and executive officers for the repair of the dam and the reconstruction of the lake. All the officials having been unsuccessful in the task, Pahlava Suviśākha, son of Kulaipa, was appointed governor of Ānarta and Surāshṭra. The efforts of this Parthian official in the employment of Rudradāman were crowned with success, and the reservoir was again brought into being. (Sircar 1968:184)

It also adds to our understanding of ancient Indian administration by drawing a distinction between “deliberative officials (*matī-saciva* or *dhīśaciva*) and executive officials (*karmasaciva*). The former were councillors, while the latter approximately corresponded to high ranking civil servants of modern times” (Basham 1999:100; Scharfe 1989:152). But it is the third aspect which is the most striking as it offers an insight into the working of the king's council — a reference one finds lodged in the middle of the following comment by A.L. Basham:

In fact the council often exerted great powers. It might transact business in the king's absence, and the Aśokan inscriptions show that it might make minor decisions without consulting him. The Śaka satrap Rudradāman referred the question of rebuilding the Girnar dam to his councillors, who advised against it, so that he was forced to undertake the work against their advice, apparently at the expense of the privy purse and not of public funds. The Kashmir Chronicle gives one case of a privy council deposing the king, and another of its vetoing the king's nomination of his successor. (Basham 1999:99)

The date of the Junagadh inscription is also of interest from another point of view. The cyclical cosmology of the *yugas* is regularly associated with Hinduism and sometimes adduced as evidence that the Hindus did not develop the concept of linear history. The time when this cyclical concept³ came into vogue is far from certain, although it seems to be firmly in place by around 400 AD. The Junagadh

³ The cycle is repeated but *not* replicated, see Thomas 1997:83–89.

inscription seems to indicate a transitional phase in its growth. It contains echoes the cataclysmic close of a *yuga* in the expression: *yuga-nidhana-saḍṛśa-parama-ghora-vegena* (Kane 1968–77, 3:890).

Some points made pertaining to Rudradāman in the Junagadh Inscription await clarification. He is said “to have enjoyed royal fortune even when he was in his mother’s womb. The exact significance of the claim, however, cannot be determined in the present state of our knowledge” (Sircar 1968:185). We referred earlier to the different views regarding the identity of the Sātakarṇi king twice defeated but due to “nearness of connection” (*sambandhāvidūratā*) Rudradāman did not destroy him. B.N. Mukherjee favours his identification with Vāśiṣṭhīputra, as opposed to the one made with Gautamīputra by D.C. Sircar earlier, when he writes (Raychaudhuri 1999:745):

This Sātakarṇi can be identified with Vāśiṣṭhīputra Sātakarṇi whose queen is referred to in an inscription at Kanheri as belonging to the family of the Kārdamaka kings and as the daughter of Makākshatrpa Rudra (Rudradāman I). The legend of a coin-type (lion: bow and tree) attributes the title of Makākshatrpa to Vāśiṣṭhīputra. We do not know whether he controlled, at least for some time, the existing Sātavāhana territory, and especially north-western Deccan (already annexed by Rudradāman) as a subordinate ruler. His Nanaghat inscription of the regnal year 13 describes him as Chatarapana (Khatarapana = Kshatrapāṇām, i.e. “of the Kshatrpa family”?).

Two other points of a slightly different nature but of comparatively broader interest may also be examined. One of them consists of Rudradāman’s claim that he won the title of *mahākṣatrpa* for himself (*svayamadhigata-mahākṣatrpa-nāmā*). Two converging reasons have been proposed by way of explanation: it might mean that he did not inherit the title from his father, and that this royal house might have faced a serious crisis which he weathered, thereby feeling entitled to call himself *mahākṣatrpa* (Gopalachari 1957:282).⁴ The precise explanation eludes us at the moment.⁵

⁴ Does the case of Skandagupta of the Gupta dynasty provide a partial parallel here? See Tripathi 1967:260.

⁵ The claim could also contain a conventional element, see Sircar 1971a:8.

A more intriguing issue is raised by the question of the degree of his commitment to the *varṇa* order, or the “caste system” indicated in the inscription. Ram Sharam Sharma identifies Rudradāman as a “supporter of the *varṇa* society” (R.S. Sharma 1980:241), on the basis of the inscription, and elsewhere brings him closer to Manu on this point when he writes: “In the second century inscriptions of Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi and Rudradāman emphasize the preservation of *varṇas* as one of the main royal functions. This aspect is also stressed by Manu, who is keen on avoiding *varṇasaṅkara*” (R.S. Sharma 1980:330).

This enables one to introduce a point which will be elaborated later, as to the extent to which such descriptions are historical or conventional, for in many ways the tenor of the Junagadh Inscription is different from that of Manu. In fact, according to Manu, Rudradāman would probably qualify as a “fallen *kṣatriya*” (x.44) on account of his “caste.” It should not be overlooked however that in medieval times even the Buddhist Pāla dynastic rulers claimed to have prevented *varṇasaṅkara*.⁶

Finally, the “Girnar inscription of Rudradāman, dated AD 150, is the earliest surviving example of courtly Sanskrit prose” (Basham 1999:415). This should serve both as an observation and as a warning. As an observation it helps to locate the inscription in the history of Sanskrit prose, but as such prose has a tendency to become florid, it also serves as a warning to allow for a measure of literary latitude. Thus “when Rudradāman claims on line 15 of the Junagadh inscription to have ‘been wreathed with many garlands at the *svayaṃvara* of kings’ daughters’ this, too, should be regarded as poetic hyperbole in an inscription which follows conventional poetical standards” (Scharfe 1989:124 n. 773), similar to the claims made by Bilhaṇa about the Cālukya King Vikramāditya VI. The statement that “his good rule . . .

⁶ “The Pāla Emperors, who ruled in Bengal and Bihar from the eighth to the twelfth century, claimed to have been staunch followers of the Buddhist faith (*parama-saṃgata*). It is, however, interesting to note that, like typically zealous kings avowing the Brahmanical faith, the Pālas were eager to suppress the social evil styled *varṇasaṅkara*” (Sircar 1971b:187).

rid his dominions of disease, robbers, wild beasts and other pests” (Sircar 1968:185) may also, at least in part, be conventional, as also the latter parts of his boast “that he filled his treasury by means of *bali* [tax], *śulka* [tolls] and *bhāga* [due share] levied according to the *śāstras* and that his treasury overflowed with heaps of gold, silver, diamonds, *lapis lazuli*, and other gems” (Kane 1968–77, 3:197). It is worth noting here that “hopeless exaggeration is less noticeable in the description of the Indian rulers of the earlier period of [Indian] history. For this reason, the earlier the king is, the greater is our reliance on his claims, in spite of the obvious fact that there is always a considerable amount of exaggeration in the royal *praśastis* composed by the court poets of Indian monarchs” (Sircar 1971a:2).

The sequel to the repairs performed on Lake Sudarśana testifies further to a historical sense on the part of Hindus. We know from the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Skandagupta that “breaches again appeared in the embankment in G.E. 136 = 456 AD and Paṇḍadatta’s son, Cakrapālita, who was the governor of Girnar, rebuilt it of solid masonry at an “immeasurable cost.” To commemorate the successful completion of the work, a temple of the God Cakrabhrit or Viṣṇu was constructed in G.E. 138 = 458 AD. No traces of the lake or the temple are found now” (Tripathi 1967:262). Significantly, the inscriptions of both Rudradāman and Skandagupta betray familiarity with the technical terms found in the *Arthaśāstra* (Kauṭilya i.8–10; see Raychaudhuri 1999:9).

This takes one into the Gupta period and prepares the ground for the discussion of the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (c. 335–375). The inscription “is unhappily undated, but it is surely not a posthumous document, as supposed by Fleet. It must have been engraved about 360 AD — after the completion of Samudragupta’s ‘digvijaya’ and before the performance of *Aśvamedha* which is not mentioned in it” (Tripathi 1967:241; also see Ram 1980:131–133).

As the main focus of the present disquisition is an assessment of the historical sense of the Hindus, and the light that epigraphic evidence might shed on the issue, the location of the inscription is worth noting in itself. Rama Shankar Tripathi notes that “with his ideal of war

and aggrandizement, Samudragupta is the very antithesis of Aśoka, who stood for peace and piety. The former's achievements formed the subject of an elaborate panegyric by the court poet Hariṣeṇa, and, strangely enough, Samudragupta chose to leave a permanent record of his sanguinary conquests by the side of the ethical exhortations of Aśoka on one of his pillars, now inside the fort of Allahabad" (Tripathi 1967:241). If this was a deliberate decision on the part of Samudragupta then it tells us a lot about the sense of history of the Hindus.

Aśoka and Samudragupta are thus comparable not only historically but also epigraphically: "we possess a long eulogy of this king (Samudragupta) by one of his officials named Harisheṇa and engraved on the Aśoka pillar of Allahabad. This eulogy or *praśasti* gives a detailed account of the career and personality of Samudragupta, such as we do not possess of any other king of ancient India, except the great Maurya Emperor Aśoka" (Majumdar 1970:7).⁷

The contents of the inscription, which seem to follow a geographical rather than a chronological order, provide a clear picture of the pattern of Samudragupta's military and political prowess. The pattern consists of four categories. First comes a list of nine kings who were "violently exterminated." One recalls here the designation of Mahāpadma Nanda as *sarva-kṣatrāntaka*, or destroyer of all the *kṣatriyas*, comparable to Samudragupta's claim of being *sarvarājocchettā* (uprooter of all

⁷ Hemchandra Raychaudhuri also compares him to Aśoka: "Samudra Gupta favoured poetry as well as the *śāstras*, while Aśoka seems to have specialized in scriptural studies alone. The former undertook military campaigns with the object of *sarva-prithivī-jaya*, conquest of the whole earth, as known to his panegyrist, the latter eschewed military conquest after the Kalinga war and organized missions to effect *Dhamma-vijaya*, conquest of the hearts of men, in three continents. Yet in spite of these differences there was much that was common to these remarkable men. Both laid stress on *parākrama*, ceaseless exertion in the cause in which they believed. Both expressed solicitude for the people committed to their care, and were kind even to vanquished enemies. And both laid emphasis on *Dharma*. Samudragupta no less than Dharmāśoka, made firm the rampart of the true law (*Dharma-prāchīra-bandhaḥ*)" (1999:485–486).

kings) in Āryāvarta (Raychaudhuri 1999:471). These nine monarchs were the following: Rudradeva, Matila, Nāgadatta, Candra-varman, Gaṇapatināga, Nāgasena, Nandin, Acyuta and Balavarman.⁸ In relation to these kings Samudragupta followed the policy of *asuravijaya*, a name which, according to Hemachandra Raychaudhuri “may have been derived from the Assyrians, the ruthlessness of whose warfare is well known” (Raychaudhuri 1999:474, n. 1). This view is strengthened by the fact that Kauṭilya “claims to have studied the practices prevailing in contemporary states” (ii.10) (R.S. Sharma 1980:160; Kangle 1988, 3:74) and although he is not contemporaneous with the Assyrians, his location at Taxila and involvement in national and (as a result of Macedonian incursion) international politics renders the idea less far-fetched than it might appear otherwise. Within this larger category also fall the states with the status of tributaries.

If we now consider the position of the tributary states on the frontiers of Samudra-gupta’s dominions, we may form an idea of the territory directly under the administration of Samudra-gupta. In the east it included the whole of Bengal, excepting its south-eastern extremity. Its northern boundary ran along the foothills of the Himālayas. In the west it extended up to the territory of the Madras in the Punjāb and probably included its eastern districts between Lahore and Karnāl. From Karnāl the boundary followed the Yamunā up to its junction with the Chambal, and thence along an imaginary line drawn almost due south to Bhilsa. The southern boundary ran from Bhilsa to Jubbulpore and thence along the Vindhya range of hills. Samudra-gupta is said to have conquered all the Aṭavi-rājyas (forest kingdoms) which probably denoted the hilly tracts, full of dense forest, extending eastwards from Jubbulpore. (Majumdar 1970:9)

The claim to the subjugation of forest kingdoms (*āṭavika-rājya*) of Dabhālā or the Jabalpur territory is confirmed by another inscription of Samudragupta, that at Eraṇ. Similarly, the defeat of Nāgasena, one of the nine uprooted kings, is confirmed by a passage in Bāṇa’s *Harṣacarita* which speaks of Nāgasena, born in the Nāga-family, whose confidential deliberations were divulged by a

⁸ Although “the dominions of . . . five kings, viz. Rudradeva, Matila, Nāgadatta, Nandin, and Balavarman cannot be located at present, we can form an idea of the territory thus conquered. . .” (Majumdar 1970:8).

sārikā bird, and who met his doom in Padmāvātī (*nāga-kula-janmanah sārīkāśrāvita-mantrasya āsidnāśo nāgasenasya padmāvatyām*) (Ray-haudhuri 1999:473).

The second category includes rulers towards whom he followed a policy of *dharmavijaya*, or subjugation and reinstatement. He adopted this policy during his campaign in peninsular India in the course of which he subdued twelve kings: Mahendra, Vyāghrarāja, Maṇṭarāja, Mahendra, Svāmidatta, Damana, Viṣṇugupta, Nīlarāja, Hastivarman, Ugrasena, Kubera and Dhanañjaya (Tripathi 1967:242–243). The geographical location of each king is specified and suggests a march down the eastern coast to the Chera kingdom and return-march by way of Mahārāṣṭra and Khandesh, although four of these: “Maṇṭarāja of Kaurāla, Svāmidatta of Koṭṭūra, Nīlarāja of Avamukta and Dhanañjaya of Kusthalapura cannot be identified with certainty” (Majumdar 1970:10).

A third category consists of tribes and frontier kings who submitted to the might of Samudragupta and gratified his imperial commands by “paying all kinds of taxes, obeying his orders and coming to pay homage” (Majumdar 1970:10). Nine tribes⁹ and five frontier states¹⁰ are listed in the inscription. These nine tribes can be divided into groups of two, one group comprising the Mālavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas and Ārjunāyanas, which seem to lie towards the west, and another comprising the Sanakānīkas, Ābhīras, Prāṛjunas, Kākas and Kharaparakas, which seems to lie in Central India, the identification of the last three being less certain than of the first two. Of the five frontier kingdoms: Samatāṭa, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, Ḍavāka and Kartṛpura, the first three are well known, and the last two have been identified more tentatively with Nowgong district of Assam and Kartārpur in Jalandhar district. It is worth noting that these “five tributary kingdoms are expressly stated to be situated on the frontiers of Samudragupta’s

⁹ Mālavas, Ārjunāyana, Yaudheya, Madraka, Ābhīra, Prāṛjuna, Sanakānīka, Kāka and Kharaparīkas (Tripathi 1967:244–245).

¹⁰ Samatāṭa (South-Eastern Bengal); Ḍavāka (Dacca); Kāmarūpa (Assam); Nepāl and Kartṛpura (Tripathi 1967:244).

dominions. The feudatory tribal states mentioned with them were also presumably on the frontier” (Majumdar 1970:8).

The fourth category consisted of foreign potentates who symbolically recognised his sovereignty. These included Śrī Laṅkā, and areas where Kuṣāṇas and Śakas held sway. They sought to “win the favour of the great emperor by personal attendance at his court, offering daughters in marriage, and asking permission for the use of imperial coins or soliciting imperial charters confirming them in the enjoyment of their territories” (*ibid.*).

Although the Allahabad pillar inscription enumerates this pattern of pan-Indian conquest as it were (with the exception of Mālwā) it does not state that Samudragupta performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. However, a coin issued by him seems to commemorate it. The gold coin shows “a horse standing before a sacrificial post (*yūpa*) on the obverse, and on the reverse the queen and the legend: *Aśvamedha-parākramaḥ*” (Tripathi 1967:247).

Some matters pertaining to the Allahabad pillar inscription do await clarification. As noted earlier, some scholars, following Keilhorn, take it as posthumous in nature (Scharfe 1989:63 n. 293; Tripathi 1967:240) but most scholars think otherwise. The fact that the *praśasti* does not mention the performance of the *Aśvamedha* supports the latter view. Scharfe (1989:56) points out: “we notice that public rituals were frequent at the beginning of a dynasty, although some have ventured to read evidence of an *Aśvamedha* in the inscription” (Raychaudhuri 1999:484).

The fact that the inscription does not mention the Vākātakas is more puzzling. As Hemchandra Raychaudhuri notes (1999:477): “It is not a little surprising that the Allahabad *Praśasti* contains no clear reference to the Vākātakas who are known to have dominated part of the region between Bundelkhand and the Penguṅgā in the fifth century AD.” Some explanations have been offered (Raychaudhuri 1999:478–479) but the fact nevertheless remains noteworthy. Similarly, the so-called Kācha coins and their relationship to Samudragupta and to the circumstances in which Samudragupta was selected to succeed remain obscure. The epithet *sarva-rājocchettā* is found on the coins,

and coincides with Samudragupta's description in the inscription. Hemachandra Raychaudhuri is therefore disposed to identify the two. It is clear from the Allahabad pillar inscription that Samudragupta was selected to succeed to the throne in a "tense atmosphere" (Majumdar 1970:7).

A special case was the appointment of Samudragupta as successor by his father Candragupta I. As son of the heiress to the Licchavi kingdom, i.e. as the *dauhitra* of the Licchavi king, Samudragupta was entitled to succeed his maternal grandfather as soon as he came of age. Candragupta's second son would have claims to eventually succeed his father as king of the original Gupta kingdom. But "under the glances of the withered face(s) of his relative(s) of equal birth ... [Samudragupta] was told by his father: 'Rule the whole earth!'" (Scharfe 1989:64)

It has been speculated that among the withered glances may have been those of "Kācha ... the eldest brother of Samudragupta [who] headed the rebellion against him" (Majumdar 1970:7). This is far from certain. The selection of Samudragupta, however, is hinted at in another piece of epigraphic evidence, the Riddhapur Inscription, in the epithet *tatpādaparigrhīta* (Raychaudhuri 1999:470).

The martial achievements of Samudragupta imply a navy, although no direct reference to it is made in the inscription. "Although there is no proof of this, we know that many islands in the Indian Ocean were either conquered by the great Gupta monarch or submitted to him out of fear, thus clearly indicating his possession of a powerful navy" (Majumdar 1964:231). John Keay even proposes that "other islands" could mean "the Indianised kingdoms of south-east Asia" (Keay 2000:137). Hemchandra Raychaudhuri reads indirect indications of a naval presence in the epigraph itself (1999:482 n. 9).

It is thus a major argument of this paper that if one is looking for evidence to judge the presence or absence of a historical sense among the Hindus, then the place to look for it are the epigraphic records left by the rulers. The fact that such epigraphs are found in large numbers seems to quantitatively testify to such a sense, and a critical examination of two famous inscriptions seems to confirm the same fact qualitatively. It only needs to be added that what was true

of the north was also true of the south, as illustrated by the case of the Cōlas in medieval times. “The exploits of both Rājarāja and his equally aggressive son” Rajendra — covering a period from 985 AD to 1035 AD — “are celebrated in numerous inscriptions beginning from the eighth year of Rājarāja, whose earliest conquest was that of the Chera Kingdom” (Spear 1999:224).

II

A problem associated with the acceptance of a historical sense on the part of the Hindus is their allegedly exaggerated sense of the past, which inclines one to say that they might possess a sense of antiquity but not history (Basham 1999:4, 44). There is some substance to this charge as the Hindu scheme of *yugas* and *kalpas* involves mind-boggling figures. There is, however, enough evidence now to indicate that both outsiders and insiders to the Hindu tradition were aware of a distinction between remote antiquity and proximate history, and moreover that rational explanation of at least part of the tendency towards chronological exaggeration may be available. The first major foreign source for Hindu chronology is Megasthenes (McCrindle 1960:115–116). The restrained nature of the figures mentioned by him led the translator to remark: “It is not known from what sources Megasthenes derived these figures, which are extremely modest when compared with those of Indian chronology, where, as in geology, years are hardly reckoned but in myriads” (*ibid.* 208). More than a thousand years later, Albīrūnī remarks that “the Hindus do not consider it wearisome to reckon with huge numbers, but rather enjoy it” (Sachau 1914, 2:1), but nevertheless proceeds to point out that those eras which “vie with each other in antiquity” (*ibid.*), are such “as not only astronomers, but also other people, think it wearisome and unpractical to use them” (2:42). He notes that in their place they employ other eras, what we might call eras of history, associated with Śrī Harṣa, Vikramāditya, Śaka, Valabha and Gupta (*ibid.*). Even more to the point is Michael Witzel’s explanation of how errors tend to creep into the use of eras: because of a cultural commitment, as it were, to reach back to

the beginning of the Kali Yuga, for “the concept of Kali Yuga, as the period we live in, plays a great role that has not been appreciated in the evaluation of chronicles such as *vaṁśāvalīs*” (Witzel 1990:28–29). The slippage from history to antiquity is thus not a mere flight of fancy, but the consequence (or cause) of systematic errors, such as counting contemporary dynasties as successive, etc. (*ibid.*).

It was noted earlier that the ancient Indian inscriptions tend to be dated (if at all) in the regnal year of the kings, or often in an era which is not specified. This was the case with the inscription of Rudradāman discussed earlier and seems to encourage the belief that the Hindus lacked a sense of history and chronology. A.L. Basham writes (1999:493):

Until the 1st century BC there is no good evidence that India had any regular system of recording the year of an event by dating in a definite era like the A.U.C. of Rome or the Christian era of medieval and modern Europe. Early inscriptions are dated if at all in the regnal year of the ruling king. The idea of dating over a long period of time from a fixed year was almost certainly introduced into India by the invaders of the Northwest, who have left the earliest inscriptions thus dated in India. Unfortunately the Indians did not adopt a uniform era, and a number of systems of dating were in use from that time onwards. . .

This passage creates the further impression that reckoning from a fixed point was introduced in India by foreigners. All this, however, must be viewed in the light of another set of facts. For instance, “the traditional date of Mahāvīra’s death is fixed near the end of the rainy season in 527 BC; it is from this date that Jainas count the Vīranirvāṇa period, *the longest continuous ‘era’ in Indian history*” (Jaini 1979:37–38, emphasis supplied). Thus it is simply not true that Indians lacked any reckoning in a fixed era. The remark holds true only of the epigraphic evidence so far available, and should not be transferred uncritically to the Hindu or Indic mentality. Another point in relation to this era deserves mention. “One Jaina source (Hemacandra’s *Parīṣiṣṭaparva* viii.341) places this event in 427 BC” (*ibid.* 38 n. 88). If this amendment is accepted, then the chronology calculated on this basis purely from Indian sources almost coincides with the current chronology of ancient India evolved by Western

scholarship over the past two hundred years (Sastri and Srinivasachari 1971:65). The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha could also provide another fixed point, although in this case also, as in the case of the Vīranirvāṇa, there is even greater debate as to the exact point (Ch'en 1968:13–15; Majumdar 1968:38, 92–94). But even when there is a difference as to where the point is to be fixed exactly, it does not compromise the claim that calculation from a fixed point was in use, with the attendant sense of history involved. What is true is that evidence of this kind from *Hindu* sources is not (yet?) available. (The fact that Hinduism does not have a historical founder may be a factor.) As further evidence of historical sense in general one may add that “according to the unanimous tradition of the Buddhists, the Buddha died in the 8th year of the reign of Ajātaśatru” (*ibid.* 36). In any case, the very fact that Hindu or ancient Indian kings employ a *number* of eras also testifies to their sense of history, although this fact complicates our chronological computations.¹¹

The example of the Harṣa Era should suffice. Dr. Devahuti lists two inscriptions of Harṣa and seven others as generally believed to be dated

¹¹ A.L. Basham (1999:493–494) lists (1) Era of the Kaliyuga (3102 BC); (2) Śrī Lankan Buddha Era (544 BC); (3) Era of Mahāvīrā (528 BC); (4) Vikrama Era (58 BC); (5) Śāka Era (78 AD); (6) Licchavi Era (110 AD); (7) Kalacūrī Era (248 AD); (8) Gupta Era (320 AD); (9) Harṣa Era (606 AD); (10) Kollam Era of Malabār (825 AD); (11) Nevār Era (878 AD); (12) Era of Vikramāditya VI Cālukya (1075 AD); and (13) Lakṣmaṇa Era of Bengal (1119 AD). A.L. Basham also mentions the *saptarṣi*, or Laukika Era of Kashmir, as belonging to the Middle Ages but does not specify the initial year. Albīrūnī lists the following Eras: (1) the beginning of the existence of the day of the present Nychthemeron of Brahman, i.e., the beginning of the Kalpa; (2) the Manvantara, in which we are now; (3) the beginning of the twenty-eighth Caturyuga, in which we are now; (4) the beginning of the fourth Yuga of the present Caturyuga; (5) Pāṇḍava-Kāla, i.e. the time of the life and the wars of Bhārata; (6) Śrī Harṣa Era; (7) Vikramāditya Era; (8) Śāka Era; (9) Valabha Era; (10) Gupta Era; (11) Era of the canon *Khaṇḍa-Khādyaka*; (12) Era of the canon of *Pañcasiddhāntikā* of Varāhamihira; (13) Era of the canon of *Karaṇasāra*; and (14) Era of the canon of *Karaṇa-tilaka* (Sachau 1914, 2:1ff.). Michael Witzel refers additionally to a Śūdraka Saṃvat (170 BC) and Mānadeva Saṃvat (576 AD) (1990:36).

in the Harṣa Era of 606 AD. (Devahuti 1970:235). Albīrūnī provides an interesting note about this Era. He writes (Sachau 1914, 2:5):

... His [i.e. Śrī Harṣa's] era is used in Mathurā and the country of Kanoj. Between Śrī Harṣa and Vikramāditya there is an interval of 400 years, as I have been told by the inhabitants of that region. However, in the Kashmīrian calendar I have read that Śrī Harṣa was 664 years later than Vikramāditya. In face of this discrepancy I am in perfect uncertainty...

Dr. Devahuti suggests the following resolution of this difficulty (1970: 236):

To demonstrate the application of the various eras to a given date, the year 400 of Yazdajird, al-Bīrūnī calculates the commencement of the Harsha era according to the Mathurā and Kanauj tradition, which placed Harsha 400 years before Vikramāditya, i.e. in 457 BC. But on the authority of the Kashmir calendar, Harsha being “664 years later than Vikramāditya,” the Harsha era should be placed in AD 606–7. We think it was this era, which was prevalent in al-Bīrūnī's time in Mathurā and Kanauj. It seems that the inhabitants of the region deliberately misguided the Muslim scholar in order to impress him with the antiquity of the era they used. Al-Bīrūnī, though in possession of the correct information through the Kashmir source, naturally placed greater reliance on local tradition, which seemed more authentic on its face value. It is well known that he misunderstood, similarly, the traditions relating to the Gupta era. His critical pen, however, has preserved for us the valuable information he got from the Kashmir Calendar, that Śrī Harsha was “664 [years] later than Vikramāditya.”

She then proceeds to add (*ibid.*):

The astronomical data provided by the *Harsha-charita* helps us to determine the date of Harsha's birth in AD 590. All the circumstances of that period support the view that Harsha ascended the throne at an early age after his elder brother was killed in his early youth. The Harsha era, beginning in AD 606, when Harsha would be only 16, is in accordance with this fact.

It also resolves a slight discrepancy introduced by Zuanzang's account (*ibid.* 236–237).

Albīrūnī himself enumerates no less than eleven eras and distinguishes between a set of six eras which “vie in antiquity” from another set of five (Sachau 1914, 2: 1, 7) in favour of which the former ones had been abandoned. This itself implies a distinction between antiquity

and history. It is therefore mildly surprising that Albīrūnī castigates the Hindus for lacking a sense of chronology on the one hand and on the other enumerates the many eras they employ. The same sense of history is indicated by the fact that, according to Albīrūnī, Hindus celebrate a historic victory as a festival, although he is somewhat sceptical about the facts. His account runs as follows (*ibid.* 2:178):

The 2nd of the month Caitra is a festival to the people of Kashmir, called *Agdūs* (?), and celebrated on account of a victory gained by their king, Muttai, over the Turks. According to their account he ruled over the whole world. But this is exactly what they say of most of their kings. However, they are incautious enough to assign him to a time not much anterior to our time, which leads to their lie being found out. It is, of course, not impossible that a Hindu should rule (over a huge empire), as Greeks, Romans, Babylonians, and Persians have done, but all the times not much anterior to our own are well known. (If, therefore, such had been the case, we should know it.) Perhaps the here mentioned king ruled over the whole of India, and they know of no other country but India and of no other nations but themselves.

There is however some evidence which actually supports this fact if Muttai is read as a reference to King Muktāpīḍa of the Kārkoṭa dynasty of Kashmir, who is said to have defeated the Turks in the eighth century thrice (A. Sharma 1982:131–136).

We may now revert to the discussion of the point that different cultures may have different ways of expressing their sense of history, and this may also be reflected in their choice of the medium for doing so. Stone and not parchment seems to have been the medium of choice in ancient India. Even in the case of documents, however, the sense of history finds its niche in slightly unusual places, such as the colophons of manuscripts. The question of manuscripts, however, raises the important issue of their survival, a problem less acute in the case of inscriptions. It might be possible, with only slight exaggeration, to maintain the thesis that historical records in the broadest sense may have abounded but have simply perished for climatic reasons, combined with political factors. Michael Witzel writes (1990:9):

A little used source of history have been the colophons of manuscripts which often mention the name of the reigning monarch and other historically interesting

details. This is due to the fact that in India proper most mss. are only of relative late date. Except for the desert areas of Gujarat/Rajasthan, mss. have not survived much more than 500 years, and Hindus in general did not care much for their preservation as only the living, recited work, in the mouth of the teacher, poet or priest was important. Fortunately, the Jainas and Buddhists preserved their texts as far as the early ninth century AD (in dated form), and a few older undated ones, so much so that when Bendall first made use of their colophons for historical purposes at the Berlin congress about a hundred years ago, he was simply not believed at first. In Nepal the temperate climate and the almost complete absence of Muslim incursions worked together to preserve these old mss. Such ms. colophons, which also contain much of other valuable and so far unused information, such as on local personal and geographical names, religious trends, etc., should be used for the elucidation of the “dark spots” in the history of particular local areas and their political history, say, for parts of Orissa, Kerala, and Gujarat.

This conclusion is significant as indicative of the kind of evidence of a sense of history now lost to us. There is evidence that detailed administrative records were kept in Mauryan times. The office of the *akṣapaṭāla*, or depository of documents, as detailed in the *Arthaśāstra* (2.7.1) provides such convincing evidence of this¹² that Hartmut Scharfe is led to remark (1989:139):

In view of the careful bookkeeping in the *akṣa-paṭāla* the virtual absence of archives and chronicles in India is surprising; but the climate would destroy most documents. The frequent change of administrative centres as a result of the rise of new dynasties with a strictly regional power base further prevented the developmental of an archival tradition.

¹² “An office of very great importance, situated in the capital, is the *akṣapaṭāla*. It is a sort of records-cum-audit office. There is an *adhyakṣa* in charge, with a special building of his own with many halls and record rooms (2.7.1). The records to be maintained there pertain to (1) the activity of each state department, (2) the working of state factories and conditions governing production in them, (3) prices, samples and standards of measuring instruments for various kinds of goods, (4) laws, transactions, customs, and regulations in force in different regions, villages, castes, families and corporations, (5) salaries and other perquisites of state servants, (6) what is made over to the king and other members of the royal family, and (7) payments made to and amounts received from foreign princes, whether allies or foe (2.7.2). A more comprehensive record-house can hardly be thought of” (Kangle 1988, 3:201).

There is, however, enough evidence of the presence of such a tradition (Kane 1968–77, 3:308–312). It is even proven by the *Manusmṛti* (x.55; ix.332; viii.255) which is usually placed between the Mauryan and the Guptan Period (Agrawala 1970:50). The Allahabad pillar inscription depicts suppliant kings seeking confirmation through royal decrees (Tripathi 1967:246). Once again no trace of them is left. Zuanzang clearly refers to records kept at the provincial level (Beal 1969:78), which also are no longer available.¹³ An extreme case of the conspiracy of negative forces in relation to the manuscript tradition is provided by Kashmir, where “no mss. older than c. 1500 AD remain. Local Hindu and Muslim chroniclers agree in blaming the Sultans Sikander and Ali (1389–1419/20) for their wholesale destruction by burning and dumping them in the Dal Lake” (Witzel 1990:44 n. 35).

One may now turn one’s attention to such literary evidence which might have a bearing on the historical sense of the Hindus as has survived. This would include the Vedas, the Purāṇas, the tradition of historical *kāvyas* in Sanskrit and literature in general.

The problem with the evidence provided by the Vedas is that it has been constantly reworked. “How this reworking took place can be closely studied if we compare the ṚgVedic form of such a popular tale as that of Purūravas and Urvaśī (RV 10.95), with its form in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.5.1 or the Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra 18.44, in the Mahābhārata 1.70 and in Kālidāsa’s *Kāvya*” (Witzel 1990:8). So what we have here are materials for the cultural history of Hinduism

¹³ The care which apparently went into the preparation of some of these documents makes their loss all the more painful. A.L. Basham writes (1999:100): “To transmit the royal decrees a corps of secretaries and clerks was maintained, and remarkable precautions were taken to prevent error. Under the Cōḷas, for instance, orders were first written by scribes at the king’s dictation, and the accuracy of the drafts was attested by competent witnesses. Before being sent to their recipients they were carefully transcribed, and a number of witnesses, sometimes amounting to as many as thirteen, again attested them. In the case of grants of land and privileges an important court official was generally deputed to ensure that the royal decrees were put into effect. Thus records were kept with great care, and nothing was left to chance; the royal scribes themselves were often important personages.”

rather than history itself. This has the unfortunate consequence that the “ancient historical tradition of India, as found in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, thus is flawed from the beginning: it is not history but the bardic reworking of the old epic tradition, often based on Vedic tradition itself” (*ibid.*). However, while itself not history it has provided enough material for the writing of one, at least at the hands of H.C. Raychaudhuri, the full title of whose benchmark book is revealing: *Political History of Ancient India from the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*.

What is significant in the *Purāṇa*, however, is the “idea of genealogy,” which in this particular case may be beyond recovery, but which provided the model for the writing up of genealogies in later more historical times. That these royal genealogies can be of historical value has been demonstrated painstakingly by Michael Witzel’s work on the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* of Nepal. It was discovered a hundred years ago by Bendall and initially even aroused some scepticism.

Its text consists of two parts. The first part is in Sanskrit, which, after presenting a legendary account of early kings offers a detailed account of King Śivadeva (Nepāla Saṃvat 219 = 1098 AD) and towards the end records a description of an Islamic incursion into the valley under Šāms ud-Dīn in November 1349, and the victory of King Jayasthiti Malla c. 1389 ad, after which it trails off (Witzel 1990:12). The second part covers the period from Nepāla Saṃvat 177 (= 1057 AD) — the year of birth of King Śivadeva — to Nepāla Saṃvat 508 (= 1388), that is, until a few years before the death of King Jayasthiti Malla. It is also initially in Sanskrit but with occasional entries in old Newārī; the account from 1219 AD being entirely in old Newārī (*ibid.*). The significance of such works becomes apparent when one realizes that “the core of historical tradition in India was the genealogical records. These have remained constant in the Indian scene throughout the centuries and in fact up to the present day” (Thapar 1978:278) including subaltern India (Dube 1998:219). It should therefore not come as a surprise that the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* is “certainly not the only text of its sort. There are more . . . perhaps many more than we might expect. The *vaṃśāvalīs* from Himachal Pradesh are comparatively well known due

to Atkinson's work. They cover the Katyuris of Kangra, the Chands of Kumaon (c. 1150 AD) and the Panwars of Garwal. In Rajasthan, there are a large number of *vaṃśāvalīs* dealing both with the royal houses as well as some high caste persons. In this region they are maintained by special classes of people" (Witzel 1990:37). As is known, in "the Purāṇas the genealogies are carefully preserved and follow an historical order" (Thapar 1978:278) and F.E. Pargiter (1922) famously tried to reconstruct the history of pre-Buddhist India from these. What is interesting here is that while the "stress on local dynastic history and the size of the area involved"¹⁴ may "have prevented the 'composition of a universal' history of South Asia . . . even this is not altogether absent. It has been attempted in the Purāṇas, interestingly again in the Brahmanical guise of dynastic history, through the linking of all royal families of the subcontinent with their mythical ancestors, Manu and his sons" (Witzel 1990:40–41).

The historical narratives constitute a class of classical Sanskrit literature. To this class belong such works as: (1) the *Navasāhasāṅkacarita* of Parimala Padmagupta (c. 1005); (2) the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* of Bilhaṇa (11th century); (3) the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa (c. 1148–9); (4) the *Prṭhvīrājaviṇaya* of Jayānaka (c. 1192); (5) the *Dvyāśrayamahākāvya* of Hemacandra Sūri (12th century); (6) the *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākara (12th century); (7) the *Kīrtikaumudī* of Someśvaradeva (13th century); (8) the *Sukṛtasamkīrtana* of Arisimha (c. 1229); (9) the *Vasantavilāsa* of Bālacandra Sūri (c. 1200); (10) the *Hammīramahākāvya* of Nayacandra Sūri (15th century); (11) the *Madhurāvijaya* of Gangādevī (c. 1371); (12) the *Sāḷuvābhyudaya* of Rājanātha Diṇḍima (c. 1480) (Prabha 1976).

To these one must add the famous prose romance of Bāṇa—the *Harṣacarita* which belongs to the seventh century and the *Gauḍavaho* of Vākpāṭirāja in Prakrit, which belongs to the eighth century. These works suffer from certain limitations such as the use of poetic conceit and their obviously panegyrical character but they do serve to draw attention to the fact that "there are more historical texts than

¹⁴ For a useful summary account see Majumdar 1964:68–73.

the legendary Purāṇas” (Witzel 1990:5), and that these “have been very little used so far” (*ibid.* 38) as source material for sober history. Their significance is obvious when one considers the fact that *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākara “can be read as applying either to the legendary Rāma of Ayodhyā or to the historical king Rāmapala of Bengal, who was the poet’s contemporary and patron” (Basham 1999:424). That such a work should be written under the aegis of the Buddhist Pāla dynasty offers comment on the state of Hindu-Buddhist relations in medieval India. The fact that the court ladies of the Vijayanagara Empire wrote such historical epics, as documented by Julie Hiebert (1988), has important cultural implications. But these are nevertheless self-proclaimed *kāvyas*. Sanskrit *literature* in general also provides some evidence of a sense of history. For instance, the grammarian Pāṇini (c. 400 BC) refers to sixty-four previous grammarians (Agrawala 1958:283); and the etymologist Yāska (c. fifth century BC) refers to grammatical, ritualist, euhemerist and ascetic approaches to Vedic exegesis (Agrawala 1958:294). Texts on *ĀyurVeda* similarly refer to earlier figures (*Carakashimhitā* 1.7–14 mentioning over fifty). Although Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* (anachronistically) lists a hundred experts in dramaturgy (1.26–39), the *Arthaśāstra* texts (Kauṭilya 1.15) refer to previous savants in the fields. Even the *ṚgVeda* (7.87.4) speaks of earlier and later *yugas* and Vedic recitation still preserves lost tonal accents in early Sanskrit (Witzel 1990:3).¹⁵ The manner in which Patāñjali has been assigned to the second century BC is also instructive (Tripathi 1967:185–186). Dramas also provide evidence of historical sense in their own way. Those with historical themes such as the *Mālvikāgnimitra*, *Mudrārākṣasa*, *Devīcandragupta* obviously display some sense of history, while a number of medieval dramas from Nepal provide considerable historical information (Witzel 1990:38–39). But beyond this it has even been claimed that the Sanskrit poets themselves may have possessed a sense of history.

¹⁵ “The authors of astronomical books generally also give the exact date of the day on which they completed their work” (Winternitz 1927:30). Āryabhaṭṭa tells us his precise age (Kane 1968–77, 3:895).

Some have read a covert allusion to the “link of kings beginning [?] with the Samudragupta” in *āsamudrakṣitīśānām* (*Raghuvamśa* i.5); to the Gupta kings in *gopte guptamendriyaḥ* (i.55); and *anvāsyā goptā grhiṇī-sahāyaḥ* (ii.24); to Kumāragupta in *ikṣucchāyaniśādīnyas tasya gopturgaṇodyam;* *ākumārakathodghātam śāligopyo jagur yaśaḥ* (iii.2) (De 1972:155–156). H.C. Raychaudhuri does not go so far but he does remark (1999:477):

The capture and liberation of the southern kings [by Samudragupta] notably the ruler of Koṭṭūra near Mt. Mahendragiri remind us of the following lines of Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvamśam*:

Grihīta-pratimuktasya sa dharma-vijayī nṛpaḥ
Śrīyaṁ Mahendra-nāthasya jahāra natu medinīm

“The righteous conqueror (Raghu) took away from the lord of the Mahendra Mountain, who was made captive and then released, his glory but not his territory.”

III

Evidence in support of this new perspective is also encountered in the work of Heinrich von Stietencron — and in a very new form: not in written word but in plastic art. Stietencron began with the same “trite observation,” (his own words), that “to the modern viewer, therefore, there appears to be an a-historic and non-political attitude in indigenous Indian art which, true to the alleged spiritual quest for the ultimate unchanging reality, did not bother to preserve in stone the transitory achievements of mortal kings” (Stietencron 1985–86:15–16). Like Professor Witzel, he eventually arrived at a very different conclusion: that even in artistic representations the Hindus displayed a sense of history. Consider, for instance, the depiction of Śiva as Gaṅgādhara (*ibid.* 18):

... The myth tells the story of the descent of the celestial river Gaṅgā to the earth in order to make her purifying waters available to mankind, particularly for the purification rituals after death. A mortal, Bhagīratha, after practising austerities for a long time, obtains Gaṅgā’s consent to come down to earth. But in order to save the earth from the danger of bursting under the impact of the cascade of heavenly waters, Lord Śiva is requested to receive the celestial river on his mighty head.

Śiva agrees and thus becomes mediator between heaven and earth in one of the important cosmogonic acts, which brings life-giving and sanctifying waters to the human world. It is for this act that he is praised as Gaṅgādhara, the god “who carries Gaṅgā.” . . .

Gaṅgā has doubts whether Śiva will be strong enough to withstand the impact of her fall. Convinced of her own strength she believes that the power of her descent will push Śiva down into the nether worlds. But Śiva, stretching out one or two locks of his hair like a hammock, receives her with perfect ease and immediately punishes her for her self-conceit; for many years she roams about in the endless labyrinth of his crown of matted hair without finding her way out. And it is only on account of the renewed and powerful austerities of Bhagīratha that Śiva finally releases the thoroughly humiliated goddess.

So far we are in the realm of myth. To enter in the realm of history we need to recall that ancient Indian history in the south was characterized by rivalry between the Cālukya dynasty of Bādāmi and the Pallava dynasty of Tiruchirāpalli in the seventh century (Spear 1994:221–222). Stietencron (*ibid.*) draws our attention to the fact that,

The first image of Gaṅgādhara based on this form of myth was created at Tiruchirāpalli in the Pallava country during the reign of king Mahendravarman I (ca. 610–630). This king was in bitter conflict with his neighbour, king Durvinīta of the Western Gaṅga dynasty, who had broken away from the century-old feudal alliance with the Pallavas and joined the camp of their rivals, the Cālukyas of Bādāmi. Durvinīta attacked the young king Mahendravarman from the North-west, and simultaneously, the Cālukya armies invaded Mahendravarman's North-eastern territories in Veṅgī. The Pallava kingdom seemed truly in great danger until Mahendravarman achieved a victory over his “foremost enemies” at Pul-lalūr, ca. 15 miles north of his capital Kāñcī. It is to be added that the Gaṅga kings were Jains while Mahendravarman, formerly also a Jain, had become a devotee of Śiva.

It was after this victory that the first Gaṅgādhara image of the type described above was created in south India. It shows the four-armed Śiva, hailed by celestials, standing in leisurely pose with one leg supported by his bull Nandin, as he gracefully stretches out a lock of hair to receive the descending goddess Gaṅgā who appears comparatively small and insignificant. To any contemporary the message of this image was clear enough. Just as Śiva stood in ease against the impact of (the water of the river) Gaṅgā who, in her self-conceit, had believed she could send him to hell, even so the Śaiva king Mahendravarman stood in each against the impact of (the army of) the Gaṅgas who, in their self-conceit, had believed they could destroy the Pallava king. No image of any other form of Śiva

and no other myth could have served to translate this actual historical situation more effectively into a work of religious art.

We can be sure the artists and kings and the educated public were conscious of this message of the Gaṅgādhara image because it retained its direct allusion to the Gaṅga dynasty during the following centuries. . . .

A more dramatic example of the interaction between the political history of art is provided by the famous depiction of Viṣṇu's incarnation as the Boar (*varāhāvatāra*) in the Udayagiri cave. Three interpretations of this depiction, inviting the reader to note how they become progressively more historical, in accordance with the assumption of the degree of the sense of history on the part of the Hindus entertained by each scholar, are provided below.

One may commence with A.L. Basham's interpretation. He writes (1999:371):

Perhaps the most immediately impressive of all Guptan sculptures is the Great Boar, carved in relief at the entrance of a cave at Udayagiri, near Bhīlsā. The body of the god Viṣṇu, who became a mighty boar to rescue the earth from the cosmic ocean, conveys the impression of a great primeval power working for good against the forces of chaos and destruction, and bears a message of hope, strength and assurance. The greatness of the god in comparison with his creation is brought out by the tiny female figure of the personified earth, clinging to his tusk. The deep feeling, which inspired the carving in this figure, makes it perhaps the only theriomorphic image in the world's art, which conveys a truly religious message to modern man.

There is virtually no historical element in Basham's artistic appreciation of this piece. We turn next to H.C. Raychaudhuri. He writes (1999:165):

According to sacred legends Viṣṇu in the shape of a boar had rescued the earth in the aeon of universal destruction. It is significant that the worship of the Boar Incarnation became widely popular in the Gupta-Chalukya period. The poet Viśākhadatta actually identifies the man in whose arms the earth found refuge when harassed by the *Mlechchhas*, who "shook the yoke of servitude from the neck" of his country, with the *Vārāhītanu* (Boar form) of the Self-Existent Being. Powerful emperors both in the north and south recalled the feats of the Great Boar, and the mightiest ruler of a dynasty that kept the Arabs at bay for centuries actually took the title of *Ādivarāha* or the Primeval Boar. The Boar Incarnation

then symbolized the successful struggle of Indians against the devastating floods issuing from the regions outside their borders that threatened to overwhelm their country and civilization in a common ruin.

Stietencron is more willing than either Basham or Raychaudhuri to concede a sense of history to the Hindus, and espies an even more specific historical significance in the depiction under discussion. He writes (Stietencron 1985–86:21):

There is special feature in the Varāha relief of Udayagiri which is repeated nowhere else. The ocean out of which the dominating image of Varāha rises with great strength is represented with meticulous care by its endless waves, and again twice in personified form as a man standing in this ocean with a water-pot in his hands. The two river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā are seen flowing towards him.

Later images do not show the ocean at all. But here the ocean (Sanskrit: *samudra*) has a special meaning. A word play takes on plastic form. Just as Varāha issuing from the mighty (ocean) *samudra* rescued the earth from *asura* oppression, even so did Candragupta II, issuing from his mighty (father) *Samudragupta* rescued the earth from *asura* (i.e. Western Kṣātrapa) oppression. The person with the water-pot standing in the ocean has thus a double meaning. He is the ocean in anthropomorphic form, but he is also an image of Candragupta's father Samudragupta.

The ocean was dropped altogether in later representations, since it could not carry similar connotations with other donors.

Heinrich von Stietencron goes on to say (*ibid.*):

Whether the Udayagiri image is an illustration of the poet's words, or whether the poet was in turn inspired by the image, cannot be determined with certainty, nor is it relevant in the present context. That such identification of kings and gods was not simply flattering talk of eager panegyrists, but formed part of a royal ideology of divine kingship and was proclaimed by kings in their own inscriptions is shown, among many other instances, by the Allahabad pillar inscription of Candragupta's father Samudragupta.

IV

Thus far from lacking a sense of history the Hindus even imparted a plastic dimension to historiography. If this is so then this provides added force to the argument developed by Professor Witzel that

Hindu historiography suffered serious obscuration during the period of Islamic occupation, as this period also involved the destruction of holy images and temples which were one form of material in which such history was preserved. The numerous internal dynastic evolutions would, of course, prove equally destructive of such evidence along with foreign invasions.

It should also be remembered that Hindu learning and the Hindu educational system possessed a marked oral character, a feature also noticed by Megasthenes (Bevan 1922:413). In fact, this has been identified by Professor Kane as one of its weaknesses (1974:347–349), a weakness which made it particularly vulnerable to historical vicissitudes resulting from foreign conquests. Albīrūnī's statement that as a result of Maḥmūd's devastating raids "Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places where our hand cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Benares, and other places" (Sachau 1914, 1:22) becomes far more significant than it would be in the light of this *embodied* character of Hindu learning. The Islamic presence in India in many ways was a positive factor in promoting historiography but in this respect its impact may have been negative. The claim that the sheer destruction caused by political vicissitudes is responsible for the mistaken impression that the ancient Indians kept no historical records (because they are lost) however begs credulity. It sounds too superficial and smooth a response to the charge that ancient Indians possessed no sense of history, to the point of sounding apologetic. Our task then is to render it more plausible. One may begin by starting with an extreme position stated as follows: the perfect genocide is one which never occurred, because no one was left behind to tell the story. The point to be made is that the scale of destruction can be such as destroys the very evidence of that destruction. One then faces what might be called an evidentiary "black hole." Some evidence on the nature and scope of such destruction involved in the foreign invasions to which *ancient* India was subjected, needs to be introduced at this stage.

After the fall of the Mauryan and then the Śuṅga Empire, north India experienced a major political upheaval in the form of numerous

invasions (Altekar 1995:350):

The period of 500 years between 200 BC and 300 AD was a very dark and dismal one for Northern India. The fertile plains of the Punjab and the Gangetic valley were subjected during this period to one foreign invasion after another. First came the Greeks, who under Demetrius and Menander (c. 190–150 BC) were able to penetrate right up to Patna in Bihar, and then came Scythians and the Parthians (c. 100 BC to 50 AD). These . . . were followed by the Kushanas, who succeeded in overrunning practically the whole of northern India by the middle of the 2nd century AD.

The *Gārgīsamhitā* section of the *Yuga Purāṇa* assesses the damage caused by the invasion of Śakas as follows: *caturbhāgaṃ tu śastreṇa nāśayīṣyanti prāṇinām. Śakāḥ śeṣaṃ hariṣyanti caturbhāgaṃ svakaṃ puram. Vinaṣṭe śakarāḥ tu śūnyā pṛthvī bhaviṣyati*. In other words, these wars of conquest reduced the population of North India by “one half, 25 per cent being killed and 25 per cent being enslaved and carried away” (*ibid.*). The *Yuga Purāṇa* (167) further informs us that during this period even women took to ploughing, presumably as a result of this decimation (R.S. Sharma 1980:350).¹⁶ Indian opinion at the time seemed to blame Aśoka’s pacifism for this disaster, for the same *Gārgīsamhitā* declares: “the fool established the so-called conquest of dharma” (*sthāpayīṣyati mohātmā vijayaṃ nāma dhārmikam*) (Raychaudhuri 1999:324 n. 3). This is not the place, however, to assess Aśoka’s rule but to point out in this context that some Indologists seem to overlook the implication of the scale of the destruction involved. While describing the state administration under the Mauryas, Hartmut Scharfe writes (as noted earlier): “In view of the careful bookkeeping in the *akṣa-paṭala* the virtual absence of archives and chronicles in India is surprising; but the climate would destroy most documents” (Scharfe 1989:139 n. 114). Without discounting the role of climate one

¹⁶ Ram Sharan Sharma also finds evidence of this socio-economic crisis in a passage in the *Manusmṛiti* (viii.418) when he writes: “At another place Manu ordains that the king should carefully compel the vaiśyas and the śūdras to perform the tasks assigned to them; since, if these two varṇas swerve from their duties, they will throw the whole world into confusion. This passage is of particular importance, for it is not to be found in any earlier text” (1980:193).

might wish to urge that the reason may not be just climatic but also “climatic,” if we use that expression to refer to the cataclysmic invasions just alluded to. Professor A.L. Basham perhaps comes closer to assessing the full significance of these invasions when he connects them with the Hindu conceptualizations of the Kaliyuga. He writes (1999:321):

The end of the Kali-yuga, according to many epic passages, is marked by confusion of classes, the overthrow of established standards, the cessation of all religious rites, and the rule of cruel and alien kings. Soon after this the world is destroyed by flood and fire. This view is propounded strongly in texts, which date from about the beginning of the Christian era, when alien kings did in fact rule much of India, and established practices were shaken by heresies such as Buddhism and Jainism. An earlier tradition would place the Mahābhārata War c. 900 BC, according to which the 1,200 years of the Kali-yuga, if read as human years and not as “years of the gods,” would at this time be nearing their end. Evidently some pious Hindus thought that the dissolution of the cosmos was imminent. Perhaps it is to the departure of this fear in later times that we must attribute the devising of the “years of the gods,” which made the dissolution of the world comfortable distant.

We need only refer to the remarks about the Boar Incarnation made earlier to see the force of the point. It is also worth noting that after political stability was restored in North India under Gupta rule, the tradition of maintaining archives was also revived. According to the usually dependable testimony of Zuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) who visited India in the seventh century, detailed records were kept in each district during the reign of King Hara. These too have vanished — perhaps for the same reason as the Mauryan. It is worth recalling that by the end of the 12th century the two major universities of ancient India, those of Takṣaśilā and Nālandā had disappeared. An example might help make the point. What prospect would we hold out for British historiography in the future, if the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were utterly destroyed today along with all the libraries. It is striking that even in the context of relatively proximate events, some of the conclusions reached earlier seem to apply in some degree. Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister and himself a historian of some merit wrote in 1946 regarding the Indian mutiny of 1857–1858:

The very circumstances of defeat and disruption prevented the Indian side of the story from being properly recorded, and many of the records that existed suffered destruction during the great revolt of 1857. The papers that survived were hidden away in family archives and could not be published for fear of consequences. They remained dispersed, little known, and many perished in the manuscript stage from the incursions of termites and other insects which abound in this country. At a later stage when some of these papers were discovered, they threw a new light on many historical incidents. (Nehru 1946:289).

V

One could offer the sensational conclusion that the claim that the Hindus lacked a sense of history may itself indicate a lack of a sense of history on our part—for to make such a claim is to overlook the fact that the very evidence of the fact that the Hindus possess it may have been lost on account of historical vicissitudes. But it is best to conclude on a sober note: that the proposition—that the Hindus lacked historical sense—is rendered questionable by the weight of the cumulative evidence presented above. The absence of historiography still needs to be explained; if anything, the need becomes even more acute. A parallel from the field of philosophy may be helpful here. Ancient India never produced philosophical texts of the modern European kind but it is no longer necessary to argue that India lacked a philosophical tradition, although this tradition never divorced itself from religion along the lines of Western philosophy. In a similar fashion, in the light of evidence presented above it seems difficult to sustain the proposition that the Hindus lacked a sense of history. Could it be that, as in the case of philosophy, it was also not divorced from a broader normative and liberatory context? Do both these facts have a common explanation?

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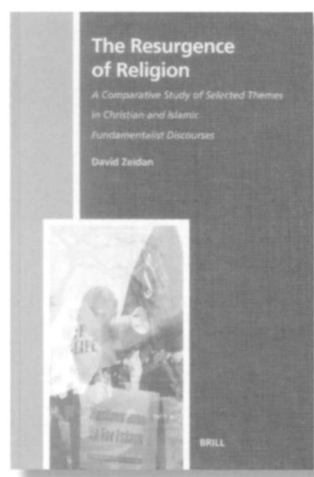
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NVVMEN

*International
Review for the History
of Religions*

VOL. L NO. 3 2003

N⁵o

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BRILL

NVMEN

PUBLISHER: Brill Academic Publishers
PUBLISHED: Four times a year: January, April, July and October.
SUBSCRIPTION: The subscription price of volume 50 (2003) is EUR 169.- / US\$ 196.- for institutions and EUR 88.- / US\$ 102.- for individuals, *inclusive of postage and handling charges*. All prices are exclusive of VAT in EU-countries (VAT not applicable outside the EU). Price includes online subscription.

Subscription orders are accepted for complete volumes only. Orders take effect with the first issue of any year. Orders may also be entered on an automatic continuing basis. Cancellations will only be accepted if they are received before October 1st of the year preceding the year in which the cancellation is to take effect. Claims for missing issues will be met, free of charge, if made within three months of dispatch for European customers and five months for customers outside Europe.

Subscription orders may be made via any bookseller or subscription agency, or direct to the publisher.

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BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON

ISSN 0029-5973 (print version); 1568-5276 (online version)

Printed in The Netherlands

Printed on acid-free paper

NVMEN

Numen is edited on behalf of the International Association for the
History of Religions by Einar Thomassen and Michel Despland

Volume L, 3

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national Bibliography of Books and Articles on Modern Languages and Literatures*,
Religion Index One: Periodicals, *Religion Index Two: Multi-Author Works*, *Religious
& Theological Abstracts*, *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, and the
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THE FAILING MALE GOD: EMASCULATION, DEATH AND OTHER ACCIDENTS IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

GIOVANNI CASADIO

Summary

The purpose of this paper is threefold. Starting from a new analysis of some selected sources but also from a reappraisal of the highlights of scholarly literature, it aims to reassess the category of the Mediterranean “dying and rising gods,” or “deities subject to vicissitude.” A first conclusion is that in spite of past and present criticism this category holds its own and is still valuable for the work of the historian of religions. Secondly it is argued that an evaluation of some significant details in the parallel stories of Attis, Adonis, Osiris (and, *mutatis mutandis*, those of Dionysus and Mithras) demonstrates that deep-seated human urges may determine the formation of recurring mythical motifs. In order to clarify the background of this process, some Freudian formulas (the castration complex, the fear of death vs. the fear of castration) may be put to the test and yield profitable results. Another, “meta-critical” implication of this discussion is that our ways of collecting data, making comparisons, and suggesting solutions may be deeply conditioned by personal concerns.

Vergleiche entscheiden nichts, aber sie können machen dass man sich heimisch fühlt.

S. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 15, p. 79

C'est en effet dans le mythe que l'on saisit le mieux, a vif, la collusion des postulations les plus secrètes, les plus virulentes du psychisme individuel et des pressions les plus impératives et les plus troublantes de l'existence sociale.

R. Caillois, *Le mythe et l'homme*, Paris 1938, 13

A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge... Comparison provides the means by which we 're-vision' phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems.

J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, Chicago 1990, 52

Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt: three lands which lie on the eastern side of the Mediterranean and facing each other hold the sea in their grip.

In these three lands three deities have their roots who bear a close resemblance to each other and have had very similar fates both in the myths told about them and in the critical speculation on ancient religions carried out by academic research. These three deities are Attis (of Phrygian origin), Adonis (from Phoenicia) and Osiris (native of Busiris in the Nile Delta, but who spread quickly to the whole of Egypt).

The first feature which these three deities have in common is that they embody a male ideal and one which cannot be detached from, is inconceivable without its female “tender second half.” As such, these gods are the ideal partners (lovers and loved ones alike) of female deities, Cybele, Astarte, Isis, who are culturally conditioned manifestations of a widespread archetype of the feminine. The archetype underlying these three hypostases of female deity is that of woman’s inborn dangerousness. This quality reveals itself at the very moment when the passionate, protective and, as a consequence, possessive tenderness of the lover, or sister, or mother, on reaching its high-point, wounds and destroys the male hero in his inmost self. Owing to this dramatic event, the characteristic feature of these gods — and this is a feature which sets them apart from other male deities unshakeable in their Olympian omnipotence — is that they die a violent death in the flower of their youth (or even before, at the blossoming of adolescence) because of a fault or irregularity in their sexual behaviour. The female figure, the direct or indirect cause of her consort’s demise, weeps and gives herself up to despair. But she also takes action and by the most varied means, from supplication to magic, manages within certain limits (temporarily or partially) to re-establish the god’s vitality and to renew the sacred *gamos*.

All this belongs to the conceptual sphere of the myth. In cult the roles of these gods are notably different, and yet it is still possible to discern a common course. While we are well informed of Osiris’ central importance in Egyptian cult starting from the second half of the third millennium BC (*Pyramid Texts* of the Fifth Dynasty), we can only form more or less attractive hypotheses on the Anatolian and Syrian prehistories of Attis and Adonis. Their stories are known to us

only by way of comparatively late, Greek sources. Adonis is alluded to for the first time in a Sapphic ode of the sixth century, but Attis appears only in the fifth century. Thereafter the Osiris and Attis cults took a common course, in so far as both of them — beginning in the third century BC and under the decisive action of the Eleusinian model and the determined work of the Eumolpid Timotheus — evolve to the point of taking on the contours of mystery cults with personal initiation rites and a specific conception of salvation. The mystical element in the Adonis story (his pathetic vicissitudes connected with vegetation life), however, does not seem to have given rise to an initiation cult nor even to have enjoyed diffusion over the whole Mediterranean world as was the case with the Attis-Cybele and Osiris-Isis mysteries (called, respectively, the Metroac and Isiac mysteries).

Attis, Adonis and Osiris have, indeed, suffered similar fates from the very beginning of comparative historical-critical research on the subject of religion. Leaving aside the forerunner Plutarch, who classified these deities (along with Dionysus and Core-Persephone) together as *daimones*, the Jacobin Charles-François Dupuis (1742–1809) in his book *Origine de tous les cultes, ou, Religion universelle* (Paris 1794–95) interpreted Attis, Adonis and Osiris (and together with them Tammuz, Dionysus and Mithras, other gods who are tortured, mutilated, wounded and murdered), “as different manifestations of the same deity (i.e. the solar Good God of Light),” celebrated at the winter solstice, “when men saw the Sun stop in its withdrawal and begin to return, again, towards them.”¹ Later the three gods were the object of an immensely learned and poetical treatment at the hands of James George Frazer (1854–1941). Right from the first edition (1890) of *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, the Phrygian, Phoenician and Egyptian gods, together with their obvious companions, Dionysus (the wine spirit) and Core (the corn spirit), became embodiments of the omnipresent “vegetation spirit” in its vicissitudes of “death and resurrection.” “Under the names of Osiris, Adonis, Tammuz, Attis and Dionysus, the Egyptians, Syrians, Babylonians, Phry-

¹ J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, Chicago 1990, 31.

gians, and the Greeks represented the decay and revival of vegetation with rites which, as the ancients themselves recognized, were substantially the same.”² In the second edition in three volumes (1900) and in the third in twelve (1911–15), the interpretative principle remained unchanged in spite of an enormous increase in the amount of historical data and ethnographic material collected. A whole volume is even devoted to the “Dying (and rising god)” in his diverse manifestations as a vegetation spirit. This appears originally as a separate work and is entitled significantly: *Attis, Adonis, Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion* (1906, 1907 and finally 1914). The Attis, Adonis and Osiris cults are here conceived as particular manifestations of a single “oriental religion” which has not yet been subjected to Hellenistic remoulding.

In the epoch-making works of Franz Cumont (*Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, 1906 and, fourth edition, 1929), Raffaele Pettazzoni (*I misteri: saggio di una teoria storico-religiosa*, 1924) and the dissenting members of the “Myth and Ritual School” (from S.H. Hooke to E.O. James and G. Widengren), the category of the Mediterranean “dying and rising gods,” and with it the seasonal pattern of the spirit dwelling in vegetation, have enjoyed various and well known “fortunes.” Even more famous, however, are the “misfortunes” brought about by the combined efforts of a long line of scholars who have set out from the most varied premises to eliminate the category. The Dominicans R. de Vaux and M.J. Lagrange and the Jesuit K. Prümm, although they were all serious philologists, were guided by clearly discernible apologetic motives, whereas H. Frankfort, P. Lambrechts, S.G.F. Brandon, A. Brelich, U. Bianchi, C. Colpe and W. Burkert, some of the most influential religious historians of the 20th century, adopt alike a reductive approach on the basis of merely rational grounds. But it is above all at the hands of Jonathan Z. Smith that to this category have been dealt the most devastating blows, so that it has, to use his own words, “been [finally] exploded.”³

² J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, London 1890, I 278–279.

³ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 100.

Although many (though not all) of the arguments advanced by these scholars seem well founded, it cannot be accepted, in my opinion, that the category of gods “subject to vicissitudes,”⁴ where the god dies, but also, in specific ways and in certain circumstances, returns to life, should be labelled “an old fossil” and as such be “of more interest to the history of scholarship than to the history of religions.”⁵ The experience which this history of conflicting interpretations has given us is certainly instructive, but a fresh look at the documentary evidence is nevertheless possible. Above all, it should be noted that this mythico-ritual pattern contains a dyadic structure which stands out with indisputable clarity. Apart from the obvious element of sacred marriage and the dubious one of resurrection, two basic events mark the mythical personality of these three young gods: emasculation and death. These two events, moreover, seem to be the two faces of the same coin: the depotentiation of divine life and its inevitable repercussions on the life of the cosmos, which seems to imitate the vicissitudes of the divine body. Hidden behind the apparent simplicity of a univocal scheme, suggesting uniformity in the psychological situations and symbolic mechanisms, lies the complexity of diverse cultural responses. The sequence of these two events (which are two eminently catastrophic events in the life of a man) diverges, the bond with the life and death of nature is variable and so does the perceivable relation between microcosm and macrocosm. It is worthwhile examining then one by one the three cases of these gods “subject to impotence and death (or death and impotence).”

Attis

The earliest tradition about this god known to us is perhaps not the one most faithful to its Phrygian origin, but it became the standard version in Alexandrian and, under its influence, Latin poetry. According to

⁴ In Ugo Bianchi's terminology (e.g. in U. Bianchi [ed.], *Mysteria Mithrae*, Leiden-Roma 1979, 5).

⁵ Smith, s.v. *Dying and Rising Gods*, in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York-London 1987, IV 526.

it the young Attis mutilates himself because he has sexually betrayed his mistress Cybele. With a sharp flint he strikes off the heavy sack containing his testicles, the organs which, in his opinion, have led him to sin.⁶ More widespread, however, is the version which represents the angered Cybele herself as the personal avenger of her offended honour.⁷ In any case, the Great Mother always appears as the author of the castration, whether she carries out this not difficult operation in person or entrusts its execution to the victim himself by instilling into him a form of self-destructive and self-punishing *mania*. In both cases the male hero yields only his virility and survives to enact his new role as a worshipping servant. He is no longer the bull endowed with a bold and erect member, but a tame bullock at the side of his overpowering mistress and master.

The most widespread (and, perhaps, most genuine) legend shows features which are in part different. In Pausanias' opinion (VII 17, 10) it was associated with a λόγος ἐπιχώριος of Phrygian origin and according to the Christian Arnobius (*Adv. nat.* V 5) it was developed along Hellenistic patterns by the Eumolpid theologian Timotheus to the point of becoming the standard ἱερὸς λόγος of the Phrygian mysteries as these spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The daemon Agdistis (who together embodies the sexual drives of the *Meter* and the wild Phrygian Zeus) brings about Attis' *mania* out of jealousy, and not vengeance for a real infidelity. The young shepherd Attis on his part *cuts off his genitals* under a pine tree and *dies of haemorrhage*.⁸

The examination of the different classes of sources suggests that there were almost certainly two mythical traditions. Both were equally

⁶ Catullus LXIII 4–8: *Stimulatus ibi furente rabie vagus animis devolsit ilei acuto sibi pondere silice; itaque ut relictas sensit sibi membra sine viro, etiam recente terrae sola sanguine maculas niveis citata cepit manibus leve tympanum*. Cf. Ovid *Fast.* IV 237–44; Sallustius *De diis et mundo* IV 7.

⁷ Ps. Lucian *De Syria dea* 15; Minucius Felix *Octav.* 22, 4; Hippolytus *Ref. omn. haer.* V 7, 13; Lactantius *Divin. Inst.* I 17, 7; Fulgentius *Mythol.* III 5.

⁸ Pausanias VII 17, 12; Arnobius *Adv. nat.* V 7.

early and genuine, but not easily reconcilable with each other. The tradition which appealed to the less theologically committed Hellenistic poets portrayed Attis as the goddess's acolyte who by castrating himself tamed *i mal protesi nervi*, to use Dante's words, and any future upsurge of libido. A loyal servant and priest, he was to remain forever at the side of his Great Mother. As is clear to the ancient sources themselves (Ovid, Lactantius, cf. notes 6 and 7) it is on this tradition's version of the Attis story that the ritual of self-castration is based to which the *galloi* of Cybele subjected themselves. Just as the priest-eunuchs of the Great Mother do not die in spite of this bloody operation, so neither does the hero, who, as lover of the goddess, constitutes the primordial mythical model of the *gallos*.

The other typically Phrygian tradition of Pessinus, in the version reformulated by the Greek Timotheus towards 300 BC, served as mythical and theological support for the Cybele and Attis mysteries, which developed in the Hellenistic age under the influence of the Eleusinian model. Here the Phrygian god bleeds to death because he emasculates himself not only by mutilating his scrotum and testicles, but he also cuts off his entire genital apparatus (the *aidoia* or *genitalia* in the Greek and Latin sources). Like the deaths of Persephone, Dionysus and Osiris, Attis' death is needed to give dramatic significance and symbolic projection to the setting of mystery cults.

To sum up: Attis can castrate himself alone at the instigation of the Mother or can be castrated by her in the mythical vision that establishes the ritual practice of self-castration. By this act her chosen followers showed their will to become *galloi*, sons and lovers of the Great Goddess. By their very imitation of his act, they identified themselves with the beloved first-born son of Cybele and could in consequence take the name of Attis, just as the votary of Bacchus took the name of Bakchos at the moment of initiation. In the theology of the mysteries Attis has to die, just as in all likelihood did the male member of the divine couple (Kybebe/Kubaba and Attis or Papas or Adamna) which played a central part in the primitive Phrygian cult. Undeniably, however, from the literature in which the myth is expressed, as well as from the ritual relating to the priesthood (and thus to the highest

level of initiation), and from the standard iconography, one gets the impression that the focal point of the Attis story is the (voluntary) act of castration rather than the (involuntary) event of his death.

In fact, as has been shown by Rousselle,⁹ who provides a persuasive and copious supply of documentary evidence, and as medical experience confirms, the removal of the testicles after puberty, when the physiological and psychic characteristics of manhood have already been acquired, does not bring with it the loss of desire. Moreover, erection of the penis and ejaculation of seminal fluid (without spermatozoa, of course) are still possible, as the prostate gland and the seminal vesicles continue to function as before. The effects would not be much different from those caused by the less brutal operation of vasectomy: one is no longer able to procreate, and the secondary sexual characteristics are inhibited, but one does not lose the sexual potency connected with the male hormones produced by the endocrine glands (the suprarenal or adrenal glands, in particular). However, although we cannot but feel esteem for the painstaking study carried out by this scholar, the fact remains that (as the ancient Taoist masters were well aware¹⁰) the scrotum is the factory that produces, along with the sperm, a male hormone (testosterone) which is a powerful promoter of sexual energy. Even granting that *galli* and *archigalli* engaged in a certain sexual activity and, besides homosexual relations to which they were naturally inclined as *effeminati*,¹¹ had close dealings with young unmarried girls and matrons faithful to the Metroac church (Martial III 81, 3–6: *ore vir es*; Basil of Ancyra, *De virginitate*, PG XXX 796), and even were publicly married in some cases, it is necessary to acknowledge that human

⁹ A. Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, Oxford 1988, 122–128. (French edn.: Paris 1983.)

¹⁰ Cf. M. Chia-M. Winn, *Taoist Secrets of Love*, Santa Fe 1984, 68–71.

¹¹ Firmicus Maternus *Mat.* I 150, 21; II 150, 13; II 271, 5; Manetho *Astrol. Apotelesmatika* III 395; Ptolemy *Tetrabiblos* III 14 (172, 15): “The men become *malakoi* and eager to have unnatural congresses and the functions of women, and are dealt with as pathics, though privately and secretly”; etc. In the Latin *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti* ed. by W. Gundel in 1936 the *galli* are called *molles muliebria patientes* (F. Cumont, *L’Egypte des astrologues*, Bruxelles 1937, 133, n.2).

mythopoeic consciousness is not based on the evidence of medical case histories. As a matter of fact, according to a widespread way of thinking (not least in the Mediterranean world), the *impotentia generandi* is symbolically identical with the *impotentia coeundi*, and so the castrated Attis in mythical terms represents the drama of the man who alone condemns himself not only to sterility, but also to impotence and passive submission to the other sex.

If, therefore, we are to come to grips with the Attis myth and religion, which enjoyed diffusion all over the Mediterranean for a thousand years or more, it is of particular interest and importance to try to determine what sense the castration motif might have had both originally and in subsequent developments of interpretation. An account of the various attempts at interpretation, besides allowing us to approach the "truth" of this myth gradually, will offer at the same time a meaningful sample of the reductive theories that have dominated the studies in the history of religions during the twentieth century.

To begin with, a glance at the most important interpretations given in late antiquity will be interesting. These clearly have no scholarly intent, but aim at a Gnostic and mysteriosophic appropriation of the myth. According to the Naassene Gnostics "the mutilation of Attis means that he was separated from the low earthly regions of creation and carried up on high to the eternal essence, where there is no female and no male, but a new creature, a new man, who is androgynous."¹² This interpretation from the second century AD reappears, freed of its metaphysical projections, but not of its Gnostic imprint, in various contemporary writers. For Julian the Apostate (362 AD), the castration of Attis means "a pause in the rush towards the infinite."¹³ Stripped of every allegorical and metaphysical projection, the event of the castration is, in Julian's words, regarded as an incitement to *metriotes*, to *enkrateia* (to be understood in the Greek and Platonic sense as "self-control") and in the end to *epistrophe* (the conversion of the soul to God and the world of ideas). Likewise, for his contemporary and

¹² Hipp. Ref. V 7, 15.

¹³ Julian *Orat. mat. deor.* 167c.

coreligionist Sallust, Attis, taken as the Platonic demiurge who leaves a trace of the intelligible in the sensible world, frees himself of the power to procreate in order to recover communion with the gods, “because it is necessary to put a curb on *genesis* and avoid the degeneration of the supreme realities.”¹⁴

For Hugo Hepding, who paid homage to his teacher A. Dieterich by writing what is still, a century from its first appearance, the most complete (and in many points the most convincing) study of the Attis myth and cult, the problem was solved at the very outset by simply removing it. The introduction of castration into the Attis cult was, in his opinion, due to Semitic influence (Dea Syria of Hierapolis), and the myth of Attis’ castration took its origin as an *aition* from the practice of the *Galli*.¹⁵ Without wishing to indulge in malicious insinuations, one cannot help suspecting that anti-Semitic prejudice was also at work in Dieterich’s pupil, as well as an almost unconscious desire, in a Germany at the beginning of the century, to relieve the Indo-European Phrygians of the questionable privilege of having invented such an apparently disgusting and reprehensible practice.

The great Franz Cumont was a pioneer in this field, too, and, even before Hepding assembled the sources for the Attis cult in his article on “Attis” in Pauly-Wissowa (1895). In his Michonis and Hibbert Lectures, which are still an essential point of reference for research on the oriental religions in Roman paganism, he tried to justify the Phrygians’ “excessive and degrading demonstrations of an extreme worship” without having recourse to the expedient of assuming a Semitic loan. Surprisingly enough, “the sacred ecstasy, the voluntary mutilations and the eagerly sought sufferings” reveal, in his view, “an ardent longing for deliverance from subjection to carnal instincts, and a fervent desire to free the soul from the bonds of matter.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Sallust *De diis et mundo* IV 9.

¹⁵ H. Hepding, *Attis. Seine Mythen, sein Kult*, Giessen 1903, 128, 161–162, 217–218.

¹⁶ F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Paris 1909² (Eng. tr. London 1911), 50–51.

This anachronistic and trivializing interpretation of cult practices in terms of mystical and ascetic motives seems to stand in clear contrast to the general impression received from the sources, however much they may be biased in their open hostility towards the Phrygian cult. The Neoplatonists themselves (Origen aside) preferred to restrict these motives to the high level of mythic representation. If we were in a position to ask the priests of Cybele or the Pessinus Attis himself for their opinions (their voices have of course been inexorably lost for ever, apart from the ineloquent epigraphic evidence), they would doubtless be quite puzzled and, if they had by chance read Plato, would cry out: "Nothing to do with Attis!"

Just like all historians of religions at the beginning of this century, Raffaele Pettazzoni too paid his debt to the prevalent model of the bond between (animal) fertility and (plant) fruitfulness. Through successive and ever bloodier mutilations, the *gallus* willingly removed from himself his accumulated energies to transfer them to a languishing nature: "Il sangue, lo sperma sono gli elementi vitali per eccellenza . . . Perciò erano naturalmente i più atti a conferire nuove forze alla natura intorpidita." The emasculation, which is, in a mild form, a kind of death, contributed (as the offering of human lives as victims did at other times) to the awakening and revivification of nature.¹⁷ But, as clear as Attis's connections with vegetation are, the gift which the young man makes of his *vires* is to a maternally ruthless woman and not to nature or the earth.

In one of his early works, Arthur Darby Nock set out the problem of the motives behind the "self-mutilation" practised in the cults of Cybele, the Dea Syria and other great fertility goddesses with already characteristic precision. Rejecting the explanations offered by Cook, Rose and Farnell, he suggests seeing the practice of castration as "a means of ensuring ritual purity."¹⁸ The eunuch deliberately mutilates himself to achieve, like a young girl or boy, that particular

¹⁷ R. Pettazzoni, *I misteri*, Bologna 1924 (rpt. Cosenza 1997), 106.

¹⁸ A.D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, Oxford 1972, 14 (1st edn. 1925).

sanctity that will allow him “to serve through his whole life the object of his devotion.”¹⁹ Sexual contact is a cause of pollution, so it is only by abstaining from it that the priest can make himself worthy of approaching the deity. “The importance of the individual’s self-castration lies not so much in the act as in the life which follows it.”²⁰ Attis, who is the prototype of these priests, has, in the same way as Origen, acted to force self-control upon himself so as not to waste the energy that is to be devoted to the cult of his goddess. In spite of the epigraphic and ethnographic evidence adduced, this interpretation is clearly anachronistic and ethnocentric. (As it seems to me, the British scholar was influenced above all by the model of celibacy laid down for Catholic Priests. In a country like Great Britain, where Catholicism is a minority creed, this model cannot but attract especial attention.)

In one of his last works, and the only one that strives for a synthesis, Uberto Pestalozza proclaimed what had for him the meaning of an existential truth. At the very advanced age of 82, he was writing after a life spent in the passionate study of the Great Goddess, or Potnia. The primitive meaning of the myth seemed clear to him, who identified without hesitation the Asian Great Goddess with the *terra mater*. (The fact is that this identity, although it also appeared to be a fact to the stoicizing Varro, cannot at all be taken for granted in the case of the primitive Asian goddess, who is a Rhea, not a Gaia.)²¹ This is once again the model of the fertility of nature, whose development can be traced from Frazer to Pettazzoni. “Nature” is here objectified as the Earth, which must be renewed and strengthened through the male sacrifice, the sacrifice of that force which the male members of society experience as a quintessence of macrocosmic potency (*vires* in Latin are “forces,” but also “testicles,” and *potentia*, in all of the languages derived from Latin, denotes the ability to have sexual intercourse). The only difference is that the attitude of the goddess and the consequent ritual process are interpreted anthropologically in terms of gender

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 12.

²¹ U. Pestalozza, *Eterno femminile mediterraneo*, Venezia 1954, 91.

psychology owing to the peculiar and in a sense more modern *forma mentis* of the scientist Pestalozza.

Carsten Colpe, in an attempt to identify the specific character of the Attis myth in relation and in contrast to the Adonis and Osiris myths,²² focuses his attention on the *sense* of Attis' castration. It does not consist in a "Weibwerdung," that is in the assimilation of the characteristics of the opposite sex so as to identify oneself and almost to merge with the female deity, but rather in the "Aufhebung der Mann-Weib-Polarität." The same motives are at work in the ritual: "in Wirklichkeit kann der Grund für die Selbstkastration nur der gewesen sein, dass das doppelte Geschlecht der Gottheit auch bei ihren Verehrern wiederhergestellt werden sollte." The castration of Attis (in polar opposition to that of his ancestor Agdistis, who was by his very nature bisexual) is, therefore, nothing other than a means to re-establish the primordial androgyne. Although Colpe finds support for his interpretation in ancient literature (especially in Catullus), in Anatolian prehistory (Adamna, epithet of Attis, is probably a variant of Adamma, epithet of the Great Mother in her androgynous hypostasis), and in the modern psychology of religion (H. Sundén), the fact remains that the ancients looked upon Attis (and likewise the *gallus*) as a *semivir*, an *effeminatus*, not as an androgyne or a hermaphrodite. That both Attis and Cybele are "ursprünglich androgyn" is true only at the deep structure level of the myth as reflected in the symbolism of the mysteries and perhaps in the Anatolian prehistory of the two figures. The notion of androgyny does not, in my opinion, exhaust all the possible meanings of the myth of Attis' castration. Catullus' Attis, it is true, appears as a manic-depressive who has lost his sexual identity (*ego mulier . . . ego puer: carm. LXIII 63*), but the real *galli* after the operation certainly preserved the characteristics of their original sex or acquired those of the opposite sex when predisposed by nature to sexual inversion.

²² "Zur mythologischen Struktur der Adonis-, Attis-, und Osiris-Überlieferungen," in *Lisan mithurti: Festschrift Wolfram von Soden*, ed. W. Röllig, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1969, 23–44, esp. 33–44.

Michel Meslin, familiar with the ideas of post-Freudian psychoanalysis on this subject (B. Bettelheim and certain other developments in France), looks for a deeper meaning and even a lesson in the castration of Agdistis (who, in his opinion, is tantamount to the Great Mother Cybele) and Attis.²³ The emphasis of the myth is on the absolute necessity of a castrating education, “qui seule peut normaliser les rapports Mère-Fils en provoquant un investissement normal qui tienne compte de la spécificité des sexes.” (This, it seems, would refer to the castration of Agdistis.) “Mais en même temps, ce mythe révèle la catastrophe que provoque la conduite d’une mère trop aimante et toute entière à son fils attachée.” (This seems to refer more specifically to the castration of Attis.) And the lesson drawn from it (since all myths can be interpreted not only allegorically but also anagogically) is peremptory and effective: “il invite chacun à se définir dans son être propre comme dans ses relations avec autrui.”²⁴ This interpretation misses the mark not so much because it is conditioned by a reading “di tipo apertamente psicoanalitico”²⁵ as because it empties the act of Attis and the *galli* of all its potential dramatic and subversive meaning. The values of religion (of religion in general and of this religion in particular) cannot and must not coincide perfectly with the values of civil ethics and are not always directed to creating a balanced individual in harmony with himself and the other members of his society.

Walter Burkert provides an explanation of the ritual which he himself defines as “functional”:

Castration puts a man outside archaic society in an absolutely irrevocable way; being neither man nor woman, but ‘nothing,’ he has no place to go. He has no choice but to adhere to his goddess; and ‘awe will spread’ around him. Irrespective of motivations, the mere act makes apostasy impossible.²⁶

²³ “Agdistis ou l’androgynie malséante,” in *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren*, Leiden 1978, II 765–76.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 775–76.

²⁵ D.M. Cosi, *Casta Mater Idaea: Giuliano l’Apostata e l’etica della sessualità*, Venezia 1986, 28.

²⁶ W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, Berkeley — Los Angeles — London 1979, 105.

Such an interpretation cannot be refuted. The loss of sexual identity is one of those situations which are reflected in very concrete, psychically and socially important facts. This approach seems better grounded than any explanations based on symbolic realities (“becoming a female,” according to Farnell, and “turning bisexual,” according to Colpe). But whoever is unsatisfied with interpreting the myths as simple αἵτια of ritual patterns will not find in this explanation a sufficient foundation for the mythical datum of Attis’ castration.

With Aline Rousselle and Dario Cosi we are back to the domain of metaphysical aetiology. In the first case, metaphysics in psychological terms:

The act of castration has two meanings: the return to childhood, which makes the castrated male the perfect victim for Saturn, and the adult whose *pneuma* can be purely psychic, since there can be no further loss of the vital seed. The practices described in the life of Elagabalus mark the return to a pre-pubertal condition. . . .²⁷

Cosi gives us metaphysics in ascetic terms with Malthusian ends: The ideal sense of this practice, coincident with its physiological effect, would be that of obstructing any immoderate sexual activity, “di limitarne o di abolirne la consistenza.” But he adds an important qualification: “non la sessualità in quanto tale si vuole arginata o impedita, ma il suo risultato, la generazione dei figli.”²⁸

Finally, two attempts from Scandinavia to grasp the central concerns of this myth using the tools of structural analysis. Jörgen Podemann Sörensen²⁹ sees a process at work in the Attis myth which is somehow circular: “When an end is put to sexual reproduction this may likewise be seen as a return to that stage [i.e. ‘the primeval level’], where life comes from stone [as in the story of the procreation of Agdistis] and where the male-female relation is not yet relevant to the creation of life.” Emasculation and death would therefore lead back to the original

²⁷ Rousselle, *Porneia*, 122.

²⁸ Cosi, *Casta Mater Idaea*, 20–21.

²⁹ “The Myth of Attis: Structure and Mysteriosophy,” in *id.* (ed.), *Rethinking Religion*, Copenhagen 1989, 23–29, esp. 27–28.

wild state. Binary oppositions are doubtless present in every myth, and specifically that of Attis, but, as a rule, any interpretation which applies Lévi-Strauss' methodology neglects the historical context of the myth and its connection with the ritual pattern. Britt-Mari Näsström, however, draws our attention to other polar oppositions. In particular, she notices the polar opposition between life and death, correlated with that between chaos and cosmos. Just as sexual swelling (ὀργάω) is a sign of life, so castration (τέμνω) is a sign of death. The moral of the myth, in line with Neoplatonic interpretations but also with "the secret rites of the mysteries," is, in her opinion, the following: "Desire is a necessity for life, but uncontrolled it will lead to chaos and decay for the individual soul. Death on the other hand will bestow a higher reality."³⁰ Remarks: It is certain that the *galli* of the Phrygian Great Mother did not normally die from castration (even if impotency is a sign of death near at hand) and so could not be reborn. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in the last days of paganism (376 AD) a *tauroboliat* (not a *gallus*) can say of himself, after having undergone the blood-bath, that he has been *in aeternum renatus*.³¹ (And, of course, rebirth implies a preceding death.)

A century of learned and acute reflection has taught us a great deal about the sense of this crucial and irreversible gesture, the pivot of this ecstatic-orgiastic cult which broke out violently in the arid and rocky lands lying in central Anatolia in an age certainly much earlier than our earliest Greek and Latin sources. If we carefully consider the main features of the myth, it turns out to be the story, taken to a grotesque extreme, of the violent antagonism, arrogance, and even depravation which fundamentally dominates dealings between the two sexes when the urgency of libido is not curbed by the recognition of the partner's personal integrity. Zeus' purely ejaculatory sexual drive (and Zeus is Attis' *alter ego*) finds its outlet in his narcissistic copulation with the rock (*voluptatem in lapidem fudit*).

³⁰ B.-M. Näsström, *O Mother of the Gods and Men: Some aspects of the religious thoughts in emperor Julian's Discourse on the Mother of the Gods*, Lund 1990, 64.

³¹ *CIL* VI 510.

The refusal of penetration by the powerful superwoman Cybele, who cannot accept the domination presumed by the erect male member (*ithyphallos*), leads to the mutilation, or rather depotentiation, of that threatening and, to her, superfluous organ. In spite of the rhetorical declamations of Arnobius' Attis (*tibi Agdesti haec habe, propter quae motus tantos furialium discriminum concitasti*), the Great Goddess, who tames and yokes lions, is either sexually self-sufficient—in so far as she is androgynous—or she contents herself with a different sexuality in which roles are reversed, and where her many lovers, Attis and the band of *galli*, play a part which is passive but not without potential sexual meaning. Like another avatar of the Anatolian Great Mother, Artemis of Ephesus, who is closely similar to her and likewise surrounds herself with sexually handicapped priests-servants-lovers, Cybele considers the pendent signs of virility trophies which she can at most use as the beads of a necklace to hang around her neck as an ornament for her maternal breast. As a matter of fact, other forms of sexuality, which indicate the subjection and passivity of her partner, suit her model of femininity. These are the forms which the *gallus* of Martial adopts when he does his best to be a *vir* using his *os* (*Epigr.* III 81, 6). Even the little finger (*digitorum minimissimus*), which lives on in the dead body of Attis and wiggles continuously (*perpetuus solus agitetur e motu*: Arnobius *Adversus nationes* V 7) can play a role and acquire a meaning in such an atmosphere, in which it is perhaps possible to detect the mythopoeic presence of female fantasy, or rather female fantasy relived and remodelled in the male imagination. Some scholars³² have thought that the finger, which “ja von jeher eine sexuelle Symbolik vertritt,” must be regarded here as a “Phallus-symbol.” Others, however,³³ have sensibly objected that the epithet *minimissimus* is not suitable for a part of the body which is neither very small nor unimportant. In actual fact, Attis' finger can

³² E.g. V. Haas, *Hetitische Berggötter und hurritische Steindämonen*, Mainz 1982, 188–89.

³³ D.M. Cosi, “Salvatore e salvezza nei misteri di Attis,” *Aevum* 50 (1976) 42–71, esp. 62, n.128.

have a sexual function just as a finger — not as a phallic symbol but as a phallic substitute. The privilege granted to Attis by the supreme god through the intercession of the Great Mother cannot be considered so insignificant if the body of the handsome Attis remains evergreen, with his hair growing continuously like the needles of a fir tree, or if his smallest member continues to possess a vitality which eternalizes the wagging function which is seemingly its characteristic. This function of swinging back and forth slackly but sensually seems distinctive of a tamed virility slave to a dominant female nature and — as we shall see in a later context — one not disdainful of the prohibited pleasures of necrophilia.

Adonis

Whereas the Phrygian Attis can trace his family tree back to the incestuous desire felt by a son (Zeus) for his mother (Rhea-Cybele), the Phoenician and Cypriot and, in any case, Semitic Adonis owes his birth to the unnatural love of a daughter (Myrrha) for her father (Cinyras). The deviant sexual behaviour of parents or ancestors which gives rise to the existence both of Attis and Adonis is therefore of the same order, and this is already a meaningful analogy in the pedigree of these two deities. Both live out their short seasons seducing and being seduced by goddesses whose vitality is overpowering and in whose presence they play the colourless role of fading gigolos, of partners without clout. And in the end a violent death, with the spilling of much blood which generates attractive but unproductive flowers (respectively the violet and the anemone), strikes both of them down before they reach adulthood.

Sappho of Lesbos (fl. c. 600 BC) was the first poet to bewail the death of the delicate (*abros*) Adonis and to describe the ritual mourning of the women.³⁴ Tradition has it that the invention of the catalectic dactylic dimeter or adonius goes back to this poetess (cf. Sappho, fr. 168 Lobel-Page). The metre is called so because it seems to reproduce the measures of the *epthymnion* which was sung as a refrain

³⁴ Fr. 140 Lobel-Page.

of invocation in the women's lament over Adonis' death. But, at least in the few verses that have come down to us, the poetess does not allude to the cause or the circumstances of his death. Although the legend of Adonis' death in a boar hunt is certainly attested in literature only from the 3rd century BC, and in iconography only from the 2nd century BC, it soon became the official version and the only important one, so far as cult is concerned, on Cyprus no less than at Byblus. The first author to describe the tragic story in some detail is Bion of Smyrna (fl. c. 100 BC): "The handsome Adonis is lying in the mountains, wounded in the thigh by a tusk, by a white tusk in his white thigh, and, while Kipris [i.e. Aphrodite] grieves, he is breathing out his last."³⁵ Ovid (*Metam.* 10.715–16) is even more explicit: "The ferocious boar attacks, it thrusts its teeth deeply into his groin and knocks him down to death in the sand" (*Trux aper insequitur totosque sub inguine dentes / abdidit et fulva moribundum stravit harena*). Before he dies in the embrace of his disconsolate Aphrodite, the handsome Adonis is deprived of the main attribute which made him the ideal lover and object of desire both to the two goddesses and to a male god such as the ambiguous Dionysus. As regards its place and manner, the wound inflicted on Adonis, is, in its basic structure and also in its deep meaning, equivalent to castration, performed, in this case with the teeth instead of a sharp instrument as in the case of Attis. Similarly the Hurrian god Kumarbi bites off the genitals of the sky god Anu with his teeth. At the core of the myth, there is thus an assault on male sexual integrity which once again has death as its immediate corollary. The Adonis myth gives voice to a basic anxiety of the male individual on the primitive myth-making level, whether the boar simply stands for the wild beast which ravages crops or somehow embodies the wild ogre who tears young heroes to shreds when they are too virile and enterprising.

To avoid misunderstanding and so as not to give the impression that we wish to draw from a single aspect of the Adonis file an all-encompassing explanation of the mythical and ritual complex surrounding this hero, let us say right away that, if we insist on

³⁵ *Epit. Ad.* 7–9.

this aspect of the Adonis legend (the fact that the main event in his story focuses on the violent breaking off of his life in close connection with the violent smothering of his virility), it is merely our intention to highlight a feature in the myth (and one which is by no means secondary, but which in our opinion has so far been unjustly overlooked) which links him even more intimately to his companion Attis.

In essence, Adonis is neither a sun god (Dupuis) nor an overly successful seducer, because he is too perfumed (Detienne), nor even a failed hunter (Piccaluga). Adonis, in the thousand-year long course of his cult, is essentially a “dying god,” or, in more sophisticated terms, a “god subject to vicissitude.” And, in certain cultural contexts and at a certain moment in history, he is also a “rising god.” This notion, unpopular as it is with modern scholars, nevertheless has a solid basis in fact. In the same ideological context must also be placed the event which comes immediately before his death and in some way conditions and characterizes it: his castration. The meaning of this event, which as a deep structure underlies the further developments in his myth, can be confirmed by two indications, one drawn from the sphere of the myth itself and the other from the rite.

Let us begin with the myth. The earliest reference to the singular post-mortem destiny of Adonis seems to come, remarkably, from Sappho, if the very late (16th century AD) evidence of Natalis Comes³⁶ is to be trusted: “Sappho has left a written record that the dead Adonis was laid out among lettuces by Venus” (*scriptum reliquit Sappho Adonim mortuum fuisse a Venere inter lactucas depositum*). However, already at the beginning of the 4th century BC the poets of Middle Comedy had taken their cue from this myth for producing witty sayings. Eubulus, in *The Impotents* (Ἄστυτοι) says: “Don’t put lettuce (θριδικύναι) on the table before me, wife, or you will have only yourself to blame. For in that plant, the story goes, Kypris once laid

³⁶ *Mythol.* V 16 = Sappho fr. 181 Gallavotti = fr. 211, b, III Lobel-Page.

out Adonis when he died; therefore it is dead men's food."³⁷ Amphis is even more explicit in his *Lamentation* (Ἰάλεμος):

It was among the lettuce-plants, plague take them! Why, if a man not yet sixty should eat them when he desires commerce with a woman, he might twist and turn the whole night long without once accomplishing his desires, wringing his hands against stern fate instead of acting like a man (literally: "rendering his service": ἀντὶ τῆς ὑπουργίας).³⁸

Comic poets of the 4th century BC are thus familiar with the myth of Aphrodite who lays the dead Adonis down in the lettuce patch. And they also know that in popular belief eating lettuce leads to impotence. The reasoning of Eubulus and Amphis appears to be as follows. Since lettuce has received Adonis' body, it has become food for the dead. An explanation thus is given to the effect that lettuce makes men impotent, that is, sexually dead. Shortly thereafter, Hellenistic poets reveal this detail of the myth in all seriousness. Callimachus (in the first half of the 3rd century BC) simply mentions that "Aphrodite hid Adonis in the lettuce patch,"³⁹ without making it clear whether he was dead or alive. Nicander of Colophon (2nd century BC), explaining the word *brenthis* as the Cypriot term for lettuce in his *Glossai*, adds that Adonis (in a story which is evidently set in Cyprus) sought refuge in the lettuce patch "from the wild boar which killed him."⁴⁰ The two Hellenistic poets, who are also learned theologians (especially Callimachus), are well aware that the story of Adonis ending his days in a lettuce-bed must have a deeper meaning. The best account of what Nicander and Callimachus must have read into the myth of Adonis' death is provided by Athenaeus.⁴¹ He knew that a certain type of lettuce is called "eunuch" by the Pythagoreans and, with superior linguistic malice, *astytis* ("impotent") by women, "for it has diuretic properties and makes men ἔκλυτοι ['without energy'] πρὸς τὰ ἀφροδίσια." In

³⁷ Eubulus fr. 14 Kock.

³⁸ Amphis fr. 20 Kock.

³⁹ Callimachus fr. 478 Pfeiffer.

⁴⁰ Nicander fr. 120 Schneider = p. 218 Gow-Scholfield.

⁴¹ Athenaeus *Deipn.* II 69 e-f.

general, he adds, “lettuce is wholesome, cooling, a good regulatory and soporific, juicy, and checks sexual desire.” It is therefore conceivable, Athenaeus observes, that the poets mean to say “allegorically that all those who eat lettuce constantly are ἀσθενεῖς, inefficient in sexual intercourse (ἀφροδίσια).”

In the myth, therefore, as it was known to Sappho and certainly to the comic poets, the young Adonis is castrated by a raging wild boar. But his ensuing state of impotence is marked by his coming into contact with the debilitating lettuce. If, however, we press Callimachus’ text a little further, we can also infer that Adonis dies because he has by now become impotent. If Adonis throws himself into the lettuce patch (Nicander), it is as if he alone castrates himself; if Aphrodite plunges him into it (Callimachus), on the other hand, it is as if he is castrated by his lover. This double possibility, in fact, is known to us from the Attis myth. “In each case the seducer is dispossessed of his powers of seduction, whether through the effect of the lettuces or through a violent death.”⁴² In other words: “For Aphrodite’s lover, death and impotence coincide.”⁴³ To sum up: Just as Attis, the hero Adonis also turns out to be a loser on the occasion of his meeting with an overpowering potnia like the Phoenician Aphrodite of Cyprus. And just like Attis he is a loser in his manhood, which is co-essential with his life itself.

There is no evidence that the priests of the Phoenician love goddess practised ritual castration like the *galli* of Cybele, at least as far as cult practice in the Graeco-Cypriot area is concerned. Nor is there any evidence as regards the Phoenician and then Hellenistic cult of Baalat or Astarte or Aphrodite, for the presence of emasculated priests, guardians of the temple, such as can be found for the *galli* of Atargatis, who serve in the temple of the Dea Syria at Hierapolis-Bambike. A shared cult of the male god of Byblus and the great goddess of northern Syria is attested, however, in an area far removed from the two cults’ place of origin, at Dura-Europos, a caravan city on the Euphrates on

⁴² M. Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, Hassocks 1977, 70. (Orig. French ed. *Les jardins d’Adonis*, Paris 1972.)

⁴³ *Ibid.* 68.

the border between Syria and Mesopotamia, between the Roman and Sassanian empires. In this centre, which was a home to sanctuaries of almost all the cults active in the Roman empire (the Jewish and Christian ones included) during the Antonine period, the Syrian deities enjoyed a privileged position. Curiously enough, inscriptions inform us that Adonis was worshipped in the temple of Atargatis, while, conversely, Atargatis possessed a cult site in the sanctuary of Adonis, erected around 152 AD. However cautious we may wish to be, we cannot help concluding that Adonis has not only entered the temple of the Dea Syria but has also felt the influence of her cult and has adopted the sado-masochistic vocation which leads her more active followers to express radically the wildest impulses of their erotic and religious excitement.

Let us now go back to the Phoenician environment where the cult of Adonis and Baalat originates. Aphaca is a secluded site in the mountains of Lebanon at the source of the reddish river which takes its name from the young dying god Adonis. And it is here that "Aphrodite joined in love with Adonis for the first and last time" (*Etym. Magn.* s.v. *Aphaka*). At that spot stood a sanctuary dedicated to Aphrodite and Adonis which was famous in antiquity and attracted crowds of pilgrims as well as curious tourists.⁴⁴ In this kind of rural branch office of the urban cult of Byblus, besides various prodigies consisting mainly of fireworks around a sacred pond, most notable was the presence of men who "after having repudiated the dignity (σεμνόν) of their (virile) nature tried to win the favour of the goddess through the 'women's' sickness."⁴⁵ In other words, men served in the temple of Aphrodite who had emasculated themselves in honour of the goddess and who, as eunuchs or *galli*, were available (as can be deduced from what follows in the report) for secret (and probably paid) meetings with women who, desirous of forbidden pleasures, haunted the temple as ardent followers of the goddess and her *paredros*. The situation which Eusebius describes in the 4th century was certainly the result of a

⁴⁴ Lucian *De Dea Syria* 9.

⁴⁵ Eusebius *De vita Const.* III 55, 3.

custom, the castration of the priests of Adonis, which went back in time at least two or three centuries, when in the Syro-Anatolian areas, unified once and for all under the Roman empire, interference between the cults of the great goddesses and their listless partners was an everyday occurrence.

On the basis of several indications, at the mythical and ritual levels, Adonis, therefore, appears as the manifestation of a failing virility which can be revitalized thanks to and in favour of a lady goddess with cruel demands. And it is a manifestation which conforms to certain patterns not because it derives inevitably from some kind of naturalistic archetype, but because of a historical situation involving the mutually fertilizing meeting of Greek and Semitic cultures.

Osiris

When we turn to Egypt, where concern with the afterlife dominated thought and action, we must expect to find a considerably different conception of the “dying god.” This is indeed the case, although the differences affect the deep structure of the conception less than is usually admitted and in any case tend to disappear in the Hellenistic and Roman ages of universal syncretism. In the first place, the relationship between Osiris and his partner Isis, at least originally, is not at all one of dependence like that between Attis, Adonis and their partners. These are mother goddesses who supervise the fortunes of the *bios* and the *kosmos* and at the same time are jealous lovers with cruel demands. Secondly, the god’s connection with fertility and vegetation, and with useful vegetation in particular (corn, specifically barley), is far more deep-rooted and explicit than in the case of the two Asian gods. Thirdly, as compared with the meagre and problematical sources concerning the resurrection of Attis and Adonis, the revivification or resuscitation procedures of Osiris are remarkably complex, though fully and unmistakably attested. A dead god and a god of the dead, he is also a “rising god.” In the words of W.B. Kristensen: “Osiris is the god of death who at the same time conquers death and reveals him-

self as the lord of spontaneous life.”⁴⁶ The Egyptologist W. Helck has stated that several features add up to a real similarity between Adonis and Osiris. His aim is to demonstrate the Syrian origin of the Egyptian god in connection with the story of the adventures of Isis in Byblos (Plut. *Is. Os.* 15–16):

They are both shepherd-gods and in both myths a main motif is the search of the Loved One for the dead god, whom she then bewails and ritually buries; in both, also, the continued life of the deceased in the earth shows itself in the sprouting vegetation. In Egypt . . . the animal that kills the god is anthropomorphized, while the form of the Loved One is doubled and becomes less erotic (in Isis and Nephtys) and the death of the god is interpreted with reference to the annual disappearance of the fertile earth under the waters of the Nile, only to re-emerge creatively.⁴⁷

Keeping in mind the unquestionable similarities and the not less basic differences between the mythical and ritual complex of Osiris on the one hand, and those of Attis and Osiris on the other, we may ask the question whether Osiris appears in the myth as an emasculated and not only as a dead god. The answer cannot be simple, because in the myth Osiris is indeed emasculated by his brother and enemy Seth, but this happens only after his death and only in Greek sources of the Ptolemaic and Roman age, where the influence of other cultures may be suspected. Diodorus of Sicily (c. 80–20 BC) states:

Osiris’ *aidoion*, according to the Egyptians, was thrown by Typhon into the Nile because no one of his accomplices was willing to take it. Yet Isis thought it as worthy of divine honours as the other parts, for, fashioning a likeness (*eidolon*) of it, she set it up in the temples, commanded that it be honoured, and made it the object of the highest regard and reverence (*sebasmos*) in the mystic rites (*teletai*) and sacrifices (*thysiai*) accorded to the gods.⁴⁸

About 120 AD Plutarch of Chaeronea informs us of the events leading up to this story:

⁴⁶ W.B. Kristensen, *Life out of death*, Louvain 1992, 7. (Eng. tr. of the 2nd Dutch ed. [1949]; orig. Norwegian ed. *Livet fra døden*, Oslo 1925.)

⁴⁷ Résumé by J.G. Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and his Cult*, Leiden 1980, 29.

⁴⁸ Diod. I 22, 6.

Typhon, when he was hunting by night in the moonlight, came upon it (the box containing Osiris' body). He recognized the body, and having cut it into fourteen parts, he scattered them. When she heard of this, Isis searched for them in a papyrus boat, sailing through the marshes. . . The only part of Osiris which Isis did not find was his male member (*aidoion*); for no sooner was it thrown into the river than the lepidotus, phagrus and oxyrhynchus ate of it, fish which they most of all abhor. In its place Isis fashioned a likeness (*mimema*) of it and consecrated the phallus, in honour of which the Egyptians even today hold festival.⁴⁹

Simplifying brilliantly, though in a partisan spirit, the Christian Hippolytus (*Ref. omn. haer.* V 7, 23) sums up as follows the essence of the Isis mysteries: "Nothing else than the pudendum (αἰσχύνη) of Osiris which was snatched away and sought for by her of the seven stoles and black garments (i.e. Isis)."

The specialists are divided as to the interpretation of this mythical detail, which appears to contradict the earliest Egyptian sources. These sources are not only unaware of the story of the phallus swallowed up by the fish, but do not even mention "an earlier wilful dismemberment."⁵⁰ It may well be that this story goes back to "non-religious Egyptian tales,"⁵¹ the folkloric background to which *The Tale of the Two Brothers* belongs. Here the main protagonist is said to have had his male member cut off and cast into the river. Other scholars have suggested the possibility "of an intrusive Greek element" and pointed to the well-known story of Cronus' revolt against Uranus.⁵² Leaving aside the question of how and when the story of Osiris' loss of his sexual organ originated, its sense seems very clear. Seth's act appears as an application of the *ius talionis*. With the cutting off and destruction of the phallus Seth takes his revenge for Osiris' adultery with his wife Nephtys. And his aim in the operation of dismemberment is to prevent the reanimation of Osiris by destroying the wholeness of his body. Moreover, it does not appear that the story as handed down by

⁴⁹ Plut. *De Is. Os.* 18, 357b–358b.

⁵⁰ H. Frankfort, cited in H. Te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion*, Leiden 1967, 1977², 91.

⁵¹ Te Velde, *ibid.* 83.

⁵² J.G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, Cardiff 1970, 343.

the Greek sources is irreconcilable with the genuine Egyptian tradition. A papyrus says that Osiris' phallus was found and placed in Mendes.⁵³ Inscriptions at Mendes and Edfu confirm that this divine relic was kept and venerated at Mendes, Diospolis Parva and other sites.⁵⁴ The *membrum virile* was of course reproduced in an imperishable substance, and the identical copy of it, the ἐμπερὲς ἄγαλμα (Plut. *Is. Os.* 36, 365c), was sacred and venerable for the very reason that it had been consecrated by Isis. Finally, the operation performed by the goddess takes on the characteristics of a veritable act of fetishism, in the two senses of the term: that typical of the *psychopathia sexualis*, according to which erotic interest is directed intensely and exclusively towards a bodily part or an inanimate object, and that peculiar to the founders of comparative religious studies (starting from Ch. De Brosses), who saw a religious expression at the primitive level in the veneration of a manufactured object.

In the Egyptian texts which are most genuine and go back furthest in time (3rd millennium BC) Isis' obsessive attachment to her deceased consort's manhood is revealed in a no less peculiar form. Instead of an expression of fetishism we find an act of necrophilia. The evidence is explicit and chronologically uninterrupted from the Fifth Dynasty to the Ptolemaic age. In the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* (632a-d) we read: "Thy sister Isis has come to thee, joyous through love of thee. She places for thee thy phallus on her vulva. Thy seed comes forth into her, so that she is equipped as Sothis [Greek Sirius]. It is Horus Sopd who comes forth from thee as Horus who is in Sothis."⁵⁵ Amen-Mose's *Hymn to Osiris*, on a stele from Thebes, now in the Louvre (18th Dynasty: 1550–1306 BC), states that Isis is she who "revives the weariness of the Tired One, takes in his seed and bears an heir."⁵⁶ A relief in the temple of Sethos I (19th Dynasty: 1305–1290 BC) at Abydos shows Isis as a falcon having union with the prostrate

⁵³ *Ibid.* 343, n.3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 440.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 353.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Osiris. He is dead (lying on the lid of a sarcophagus), but strikingly ithyphallic.⁵⁷ Of a later date (belonging to the Ptolemaic age: 330–30 BC) is *Pap. Louvre 3079 (Glorification of Osiris)*. Isis herself speaks proudly in the first person using the style of Greek aretalogies of the Roman age to describe her special activity: “I have played the part of a man though I am a woman, in order to wake thy name here on earth. Since thy divine seed was in my body I have conceived him (i.e. Horus).” It would be difficult to be more explicit. “The suggestion is that Isis, having succeeded in reviving the dead Osiris, was in a way responsible for both aspects of the sexual act.”⁵⁸ The testimony of the Greek Plutarch is the last, and characteristically reserved. In *Is. Os.* 19, 358e, he says laconically that Isis “having had sexual intercourse with Osiris after his death, bore Harpocrates.” But in *Is. Os.* 17, 357d, he gives us to understand that his Graeco-Egyptian sources were far more detailed on the subject. After the lucky find of the λάρναξ at Byblus, Isis finally opens the chest and “pressing her face to that of Osiris, she embraces him and begins to cry.” Behind the words ἀσπάσασθαι and δακρύνειν a more intimate act may be discerned, leading to the conception of Horus. The reason for the terrible punishment suffered by the son of the king of Byblus, incautious voyeur of an uncanny sacred marriage, thus becomes clear.

To sum up, in the story of Osiris the castration motif is not particularly significant (as it is, on the contrary, in the tale of his brother Seth). Moreover, the removal of the genitals, involving the end of sexual life, is not *tout court* to be identified with a castration which brings about an impairment of the vital energy produced by the testicles. This holds true even less in the case of Osiris, who seems to be equipped with a *membrum virile* truly *semper virens*. However, what is striking in this fundamental example of Egyptian myth-making — and was discreetly repressed by the Greek observer — is the leading and in all respects peculiar role played by the goddess Isis. Not only is

⁵⁷ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago 1948, fig. 18; L. Manniche, *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt*, London — New York 1987, fig. 51.

⁵⁸ Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, 353.

she successful, through magical arts and unutterable tonic treatments, where Cybele and Astarte/Aphrodite failed, and not only does she manage to revitalize her husband's *membrum virile*, whether it had been lost or appeared to be dead from a physiological point of view, but, as is insistently underlined by the Egyptian and ably omitted by the Greek sources, she is the one to take the initiative in the copulation *in extremis*. And it is once again Isis who assumes the dominant position, a position which in Egypt as in most cultures is usually reserved for the man, as one of the sources does not fail to notice ("I have played the part of a man").⁵⁹ This is an inversion of the geometry of copulation that has symbolic reflexes at a psychological and anthropological level and appears shocking to the collective consciousness of several cultures (compare, for example, the attitude of Calandrino in the third *novella* of the eighth *giornata* in Boccaccio's *Decameron*). In our opinion, this feature is related to other aspects of the Egyptian world-view, and in particular to the fundamental and well-known cosmogonic representation of the sky as a female (Nut) arching over the male earth (Geb) in order to copulate and procreate the young gods. And above all it seems to us in keeping with the role of women in Egyptian society, a role of almost complete equality with men, which remained in varying degrees steady for over three millennia.⁶⁰

An Outsider from the West: Dionysus

It is clear that the Greeks, as much as and even more than the other peoples of the Mediterranean *Kulturkreis*, were fascinated and obsessed by the image of the *membrum virile*, the only one of the parts of the body which seems to enjoy a life of its own, possessing as it does a motive power which does not depend on a message from the brain. One has only to consider (even quantitatively) the vast

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cf. Ch. Desroches Noblecourt, *La femme au temps des Pharaons*, Paris 1986, 228–239 ("L'Égypte est, dans l'Antiquité, le seul pays qui ait vraiment doté la femme d'un statut égal à celui de l'homme": 228) and 424–25 (bibl.). Foreigners like the Greek Herodotus (II 35) were obviously shocked by this unpredictable situation.

number of documents put together by H. Herter in the eighty or more columns dedicated to the word *phallos* and connected terms (Phales, Phallen, *phallophoria*, etc.) in the encyclopaedia of Pauly-Wissowa. Apart from the certainly pre-Hellenic Priapus, Dionysus is the god around whom the greatest and most formidable part of Greek fantasies about the phallus are gathered. And for the majority of Greeks the phallus appears as a veritable ἄγαλμα τῷ Διονύσῳ.⁶¹

The phallus is not a mere appendix of the body as are other extremities and protuberances. For a Greek man, the male genital organ possesses a personality of its own and on that account performs a function in the religious, magical and apotropaic spheres. The paradigmatic expression of this idea is, in visual art, the phallus-bird, a living creature which has the size and shape of an erect penis, with the scrotum clearly in view, but also the wings and claws of a bird and an eye in place of the cleft in the glans.⁶² Its clearest association with the god Dionysus in a theatrical context is to be found in the Karystion monument on Delos. At the base of a colossal stone phallus, dedicated by Karystion in the third century BC, appears a frontal phallus-bird in relief commemorating the *phallagogia* or πομπή τοῦ φαλλοῦ which every year took place at the Delian Dionysia. Well-known passages of Aristophanes and Plutarch, as well as representations on pottery, provide evidence for the phallus procession in Attica on the occasion of the rustic Dionysia and other festivals.⁶³ Semos of Delos attests the presence of *phallophoroi* and *ithyphalloi* on the stage in Sicyon,⁶⁴ while in the Hellenistic and Roman ages the *phallophoros* or the *phallophoria* carried on a wagon becomes an indispensable ingredient of Dionysian ritual. On the other hand, in the Bacchic mysteries, which took shape at a time well before that of their greatest diffusion

⁶¹ The evidence is collected by H. Herter, s.v. *Phallos*, in Pauly-Wissowa, *RE* 19:2 (1933) 1681–1748, spec. 1701–1710 (Dionysoskult).

⁶² Cf. Herter, *ibid.* 1723–1728.

⁶³ Cf. Herter, *ibid.* 1674–1676 and 1703–1706; G.M. Hedreen, *Silens in Attic Black-figure Vase-painting*, Ann Arbor 1992, 129, 158, and 169.

⁶⁴ Cf. Herter, *ibid.* 1678–1680.

throughout the Hellenistic world, the mystical phallus, in all likelihood planted in the ground, performed an essential function in the initiation of the *mystai* who wanted to relive an experience of the god most intensely.⁶⁵ There is an absolutely certain connection between the initiation phallus, for which there is evidence in the mystery cult of Lerna, but which was perhaps also taken over in the Hellenistic and Roman *Bacchanalia* of the second century BC, and the phallus which rises (whether uncovered or concealed by a cloth) in the midst of the fruit in the *liknon*, the sieve or winnowing fan that appears as a characteristic symbol of Dionysus on monuments not earlier than the Hellenistic age.⁶⁶ In the cult of Dionysus, the *liknon* can turn up in a secularized version, so to speak, simply overflowing with fruit as a symbol of plenty. But it can also contain the mask or head of the god (*chous* in the Vlastos collection) or the god himself in his epiphany as a child (Campana reliefs), and this image reflects, of course, the ineffable story of the *pathe* developed in the Orphic tradition.⁶⁷ But the *liknon* which was taken over in the mysteries and came close to becoming the very ideogram of the Bacchic *telete*, wonderfully represented in the wall-paintings of the Villa Itern at Pompei, is the basket overflowing with fruit and containing an erect phallus, “nicht mehr nur ein Symbol der Fruchtbarkeit, sondern nun auch der Wiedergeburt oder des seligen Lebens nach dem Tode.”⁶⁸

The phallus of the Dionysian mysteries has, therefore, the appearance of a *membrum* violently separated, almost torn from the rest of the body. Is this proof that Dionysus was conceived, at least within certain cult layers, as a castrated god, or even as a god completely deprived of the genital organ? This is the view of K. Kerényi, in whose

⁶⁵ Cf. Herter, *ibid.* 1706–1707, and G. Casadio, *Storia del culto di Dioniso in Argolide*, Roma 1994, 284–312, esp. 305–307 (cult at Lerna).

⁶⁶ Cf. Herter, *ibid.*, 1707–1709, and M.P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic Age*, Lund 1957, 21–37.

⁶⁷ Cf. Nilsson, *ibid.* 26–27 and fig. 4 (Choes-jug from the Vlastos collection), 108–109 and fig. 29 (Campana relief), 38–45 (Dionysos Lyknites in the Orphic tradition). Also U. Bianchi, *The Greek Mysteries*, Leiden 1976, figs. 82 and 89 (with captions).

⁶⁸ Herter, *op. cit.* 1707.

opinion the phallus, “*pars pro toto* of indestructible life,” is mythically devoured by the women who in this way snuff out “the male sex of their species.” “They killed the indestructible, the god, but only seemingly, for they preserved and reawakened him periodically, in every second year. This was the content of their great mysteries.”⁶⁹ Such a categorical statement, which also does away with any distinction between the ritual *orgiasmos* of the maenads and the liturgical practice of the *mystai*, finds very little support in the sources. As I have pointed out elsewhere,⁷⁰ only in the cult of the Cabiri and Corybantes mentioned by Clement of Alexandria (*Protrepticus* 2.19.4–5) Dionysus’ *aidoion*, placed inside a *kiste* (and not in a *liknon*), is at the centre of mythical speculation admitting a mysteriosophical interpretation. “For this reason,” Clement adds, “probably some people want to give Dionysus the name of Attis, because he is deprived of his genitals.” If the *scholium* to this passage can be relied on, one is asked to believe that Dionysus’ member found its way into the *kiste* because it had been put there after the *sparagmos* inflicted on him by the Titans. It cannot be mere chance that the goddess who takes it upon herself to gather the scattered limbs of the god is Rhea, the mother of the gods. Nor can it be an accident that Rhea, too, like Isis in her own myth, is unable to recover, alone of all his limbs, his *membrum virile*. In the Hellenistic age, the relations of Dionysus with the Phrygian mother of the gods become closer and closer, and inevitably the Greek god, above all in his child-like manifestation, ends up by being assimilated to Attis, whereas the Phrygian god in theosophical speculation is felt to be the local expression of Dionysus himself.⁷¹ As a result of this syncretistic merging of the two deities, the idea of emasculation, which in the Dionysus myth was only

⁶⁹ Ch. Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, London 1976, 260–261. Cf. M. Jameson, “The Asexuality of Dionysus,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Th.H. Carpenter and Ch.A. Faraone, Ithaca-London 1993, 44–64, esp. 45, n.2; R. Schlesier, “Mixtures of Masks: Maenads as Tragic Models,” *ibid.* 89–114, esp. 109–110, n.76.

⁷⁰ Casadio, *Storia del culto di Dioniso in Argolide*, 312, n.136.

⁷¹ Cf. G. Sfameni Gasparro, “Interpretazioni gnostiche e misteriosofiche del mito di Attis,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel*

virtual (his tendency to be a passive partner and his female potentiality are well known),⁷² wins a place for itself in the religious psychology of his initiates.

The attitude of a Greek may be symptomatic here. Lucian, on a visit to Syria, sees the gigantic phalluses set up at the temple entrance as a sure sign that the god has passed by.⁷³ And that is not all. He finds, or believes that he finds, an inscription which runs: "These phalluses, I, Dionysus, dedicated to Hera, my stepmother." The wife of Zeus, a maternal figure, has taken the place of Rhea, the mother of the gods. And naturally, in so far as she is a stepmother *par excellence*, she is most fit for the role of the castrating woman, to whom her stepson Dionysus dedicates the multiplied image of his sacrificed virility.

An Outsider from the East: Mithras' Bull

The type of the "Great Goddess" who is at once Great Mother and *femme fatale* plays even less of a role in the mysteries of Mithras than in Dionysiac mysteries, where the figures of the loving mother Semele and the maternal lover Ariadne appear. The god Mithras himself does not belong to the category of the "dying gods" nor even, strictly speaking, to that of "gods subject to vicissitudes." Nevertheless, there appears in Mithraism a figure of "dying god," who is at the centre of a vicissitude of suffering and death, and this vicissitude is the source of life and salvation for the whole of creation. This "dying god" is, of course, the bull sacrificed by the living god Mithras.

There is no need to stress the centrality of the tauroctony in the Mithras cult, either in the myth as a validating event connecting the *telos* with the *arche* or in the ritual as a sacrifice with an eminently

on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday, Leiden 1981, 376–411, esp. 389–390, notes 47 and 49.

⁷² Cf. Casadio, *Storia del culto di Dioniso in Argolide*, 295–308 (the love story with Prosymnus); and, more generally, *id.*, *Il vino dell'anima. Storia del culto di Dioniso a Corinto, Sicione, Trezene*, Rome 1999, 115–117 (with the textual evidence and bibliography), and 208–211 (with the visual evidence).

⁷³ Lucian *De Dea Syria* 16, cf. 28.

soteriological meaning. It should be noted, however, that the protagonists responsible for the action carried out on the bull (equivalent in meaning to a sacrifice, but taking the form of a deadly act of aggression) are two in number: the dagger of Mithras rips open its veins and sets going the blood-letting process which will end with the death of the bull, whereas the scorpion grips the bull's genitals at their base, in the very place where its life throbs. The god is doubtless the main actor in the sacrifice. He brandishes his weapon, and the red blood, the primary sign of life, gushes out. But the scorpion's role is not negligible. Though, unlike the action undertaken by Mithras, which has been fully studied and made the object of the most elaborate (and sometimes the most far-fetched interpretations), the action to which the scorpion devotes itself with cruel and meticulous efficiency has as a rule been overlooked or simply compared to the parts played by the dog and the snake. These animals, however, perform an activity whose significance is very different: the absorption of the vital substance in its most striking manifestation, the red fluid of the blood.

What is the role of the scorpion in the Mithraic bull sacrifice? It can hardly be denied that the scorpion, in so far as it coincides with the sign of the zodiac Scorpio, fits with a precise function into the complex astronomical and astrological pattern formed by the sequence of scorpion, snake, crater, lion, dog, etc.⁷⁴ But the astrological code, undoubtedly at work in the mind of the brilliant "inventor" of the mysteries and, in all likelihood, passed on with other ingredients of arcane discipline to the upper echelons of the Mithraic hierarchy, certainly did not exhaust all the many meanings of this central icon of the Mithraeum, on which the eyes of the initiates gazed fixedly during group liturgy. The scorpion which gropes about like a sinister brigand armed with tentacles under the undefended groins of the proud quadruped is not only a sign of the zodiac. He is an executioner like Mithras himself, and, just as the god does on a different level, he commits an apparently maleficent deed, but one which is guided by

⁷⁴ Cf. R. Beck, "Mithraism since Franz Cumont," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 17:4 (1984), 2002–2115, esp. 2080, n.123.

providence. What then is the scorpion doing? What can be the sense of its action? As is clear from countless representations which almost exactly reproduce the same iconography with minimal variations, the scorpion seizes the bull's bulging round scrotum with his chelas, used as in nature like pincers. It is difficult to believe that its intentions are beneficent and aimed at promoting fertility, as Campbell and Hinnells maintain.⁷⁵ On the other hand it is not possible to see the action of the scorpion clinging to the bull's scrotum as the attempt to take possession of the source of life by drinking the sperm of the divine animal, as is held by the majority of interpreters.⁷⁶ The Mithraic theologians, who were able astronomers and certainly well versed in the natural sciences, could not have been so ignorant of physiology and anatomy as to believe that the scrotum was the reservoir of the sperm. On the contrary, when it is shown at all, as in the bull sacrifice in the Vatican Museums,⁷⁷ the seminal fluid is discharged from a drooping penis. But the scorpion does not seem to be at all interested in the semen, attracted as it is by the huge globe that seems to offer itself to its greedy mouth. Actually, the nippers help the scorpion to seize its prey and to bring it within reach of its mouth after it has annihilated it with the poisonous sting of its tail. And without assuming, as does F. Cumont, that the scorpion really intends to "dévorer les parties génitales,"⁷⁸ the viewer gets the distinct impression that the claws of the scorpion are performing what appears to be their natural function of not only grasping but also of cutting. If then the nippers of the scorpion are in fact cutting nippers, the final result will be the severing of the scrotum, and so castration.

⁷⁵ L.A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, Leiden 1968, 26–27; J.R. Hinnells, "Reflections on the Bull-slaying Scene," in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. J.R. Hinnells, Manchester 1975, II 290–312, esp. 298–300.

⁷⁶ After Cumont, Lommel and Turcan, R. Merkelbach, *Mithras*, Königstein 1984, 94.

⁷⁷ M.J. Vermaseren, *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae*, The Hague 1956–1960, No. 548.

⁷⁸ *Les mystères de Mithra*, Brussels 1913³, 137.

The scorpion's role in the bull sacrifice seems, therefore, to be that of inflicting another death on the bull (or at least of threatening it), the death of its vital energy, located in the central organ of its virility and fertility. If we consider that the scorpion is the animal and the sign of the zodiac connected with the third level of the Mithraic hierarchy, that of the *miles*, we can imagine that the soldiers of Mithras, not without emotional involvement, focused their attention on the exploits of their patron saint. Moreover, the Scorpio and the Mithraic *milites* fall quite significantly under the protection of Mars, both as a god and a planet, and the aggressive and destructive nature of this god may be of significance here. To see the bull's castration, the aggression against the virility of the highest emblem of virile potency, as the other side of the Mithraic sacrifice accords with the ideology of the military caste, within which, as is well-known, a considerable part of the initiates of the Mithraic brotherhood was recruited. It was of course an ideology centring upon masculine values and thus prone to be obsessed by the terror of the loss or absence of virile potency.

Conclusions

At the end of our excursion through these myths and rituals of the ancient world, which we have selected and interpreted but not, we think, distorted, it is our distinct impression that the constants outnumber the variables. But this result should not lead us to hasty conclusions and broad generalizations. The writer of this paper believes in the existence of psychological archetypes which express themselves in cultural and individual "idiolects," concurring in the formation of historical phenomena, but is considerably more sceptical about the possibility of identifying ideal types (or typologies) which might serve to explain individual phenomena. On the whole, therefore, he prefers to let the facts speak for themselves. However, a comparison with some famous paradigms worked out by the father of psychoanalysis may have a certain heuristic value.

As is well known, according to Freud the idea that the woman, whose genital apparatus is flat and without the bulge of the phallus, is a castrated man gave rise to the male castration complex (*Kastra-*

tionskomplex). Contrary to popular belief, however, neither the motif of the “castrating woman” nor even the much more concrete notion of the “castrating mother” appears in Freud. The threat of castration (*Kastrationsdrohung*), brought against the little boy who has taken up playing with his penis, comes from both parents. And, indeed, “If the threat is delivered by the mother or some other female she usually shifts its performance on to the father — or the doctor.”⁷⁹ So, neither Attis nor Adonis nor Dionysus, whose virility is threatened in different ways by different woman figures, fit the Freudian model. For the fear of castration (*Kastrationsangst*), according to Freud, is not fear “vor einer Kastration *durch* die Frau sondern eine Angst vor der Kastration als Angleichung *an* die Frau.”⁸⁰ The Freudian model of the woman as a castrated man is confirmed unexpectedly, though *a contrario*, by the ritual practices and popular feeling about the castration of the *galli*, both in myth and in ritual. According to Lucian, after castration, Attis takes on the appearance (*morphe*) of a woman and puts on women’s clothes.⁸¹ Likewise, it is said of the *galli* of the Dea Syria that, to imitate the hero Combabus, they emasculate themselves and become womanish (θηλύνονται).⁸² Lucian himself seems to have been present at one of these happenings: the novice, after emasculating himself with a sword, “takes up female attire and women’s ornaments.”⁸³

A less famous Freudian formula, but one equally important for the history of religions, aims at explaining the attitude of the unconscious towards the (unknown) experience of death:

I am therefore inclined to adhere to the view that the fear of death should be regarded as analogous to the fear of castration and that the situation to which the

⁷⁹ *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (1915) = *Standard Edition*, 16 (1963) 369.

⁸⁰ R. Schlesier, *Mythos und Weiblichkeit bei Sigmund Freud*, Frankfurt am Main 1981, 1990², 170; cf. 126.

⁸¹ *De Dea Syria*, 15.

⁸² *Ibid.* 27.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 51.

ego is reacting is one of being abandoned by the protecting super-ego . . . so that it has no longer any safeguard against all the dangers that surround it.⁸⁴

As we have seen, an oscillation between the idea of death and the idea of castration — as a threat, a fear, an ineluctable event — is found in all the mythico-ritual complexes examined. In the case of Attis, the oscillation is revealed by the presence of two mythical variants. In the case of Adonis, death also means castration, which is not expressed in the narrative, but only alluded to through the motif of the lettuce which causes impotence. In the myth of Osiris there is almost identity between the vital force and the virile potency restored by the Isiac ritual of reanimation. In the (Orphic or Cabiric) mysteriosophical vision, Dionysus' phallus is at the centre of a plot in which life alternates with death, which in turn alternates with rebirth. Finally, in Mithraic ideology, the risk of the loss of male potency is iconographically equated with the risk of the destruction of life's source. In general, apart from specific cultural differences, it will be recognized that in the world-view common to the ancient Mediterranean peoples,⁸⁵ castration is conceived, in the same way as death, as a dramatic event which stops, or threatens to stop, the flow of life.

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⁸⁴ *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst* (1926) = *Standard Edition*, 20 (1959) 130. For further developments of this idea in the history of the psychoanalysis after Freud, see A. Green, *Le complexe de castration*, Paris 1990, esp. the conclusion, 117–123 (“Sense du complexe de castration”).

⁸⁵ The idea that impotency is equal to death is explicitly emphasized by Greek and Roman sources: see D. Sider, “Heraclitus in the Derveni Papyrus,” in *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, ed. A. Laks and G.W. Most, Oxford 1997, 129–148, esp. 145, n.47.

THE POWER OF THE IMPURE:
TRANSGRESSION, VIOLENCE AND SECRECY IN BENGALI
ŚĀKTA TANTRA AND MODERN WESTERN MAGIC

HUGH B. URBAN

Summary

Since their first encounter with the complex body of texts and traditions called “Tantras,” Western scholars have been simultaneously repulsed and horrified, yet also tantalized and titillated by the deliberate use of normally impure and defiling substances in Tantric practice. Yet, with a few exceptions, they have made little headway in interpreting the deeper religious and social role of impurity, either in Tantric ritual or in the history of religions generally. This paper compares the role of ritual impurity and transgression in two very different traditions, widely separated both historically and geographically: the Śākta school of Tantra in Bengal (focusing on the 16th century *brāhmaṇ*, Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa) and modern Western magic (focusing on Aleister Crowley and the Ordo Templi Orientis). Specifically, I look closely at the manipulation of impure bodily substances — such as blood, semen and vaginal fluids — in sexual rituals and animal sacrifice. By playing off of these two examples in a kind of metaphoric juxtaposition, I hope to shed some new light on the role of impurity, transgression and secrecy in both cases and also in the comparative study of religion as a whole. Adapting some insights from Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, I argue that the ritual use of impurity has much larger social and political implications, as a means of harnessing the tremendous power that flows through the physical universe, the human body and the social body alike.

He who is hesitant in the drinking [of wine] or is disgusted by semen and menstrual blood is mistaken about what is [in fact] pure and undefiled; thus he fears committing a sin in the act of sexual union. He should be dismissed — for how can he worship the Goddess. . . ?

Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra*¹ (BTS 697)

¹ Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra*, ed. Śrī Rasikamohana Caṭṭopādhyāya (Calcutta: Navabhārata Publishers 1996), 697. This text will hereafter be referred to as BTS.

Transgression opens onto a scintillating and constantly affirmed world ... without the serpentine 'no' that bites into fruits and lodges contradictions at their core. It is the solar inversion of the satanic denial ... [I]t opens the place where the divine functions.

Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression"²

In this article I would like to address two basic questions. The first is the role of impurity and transgression in religious rituals — that is, the use of substances that are normally prohibited and considered polluting by conventional social and religious standards.³ And the second is the role of comparison in the academic study of religion — that is, the juxtaposition of two or more phenomena in order to generate new insights and to re-configure our way of seeing the world, which is, I think, one of the things that characterizes what we as historians of religions do.

Specifically, I want to focus on the role of impurity in the ritual traditions of Hindu Śākta Tantra and modern Western magic. Since their first encounters with Indian religions in the 18th and 19th centuries, Western scholars have been simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by the tradition of Tantra. A form or religious practice infamous for its deliberate use of impure substance and transgressive rituals, Tantra has long been for Western readers a source of both moral repugnance and tantalizing allure. In most early Orientalist scholarship and Christian missionary works, Tantra was regularly

² M. Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette, New York: Routledge, 62.

³ For a good overview of the role of transgression in religion, see Michael Taussig, "Transgression," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998, 349–364. The more important works on the topic include: Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, New York: Zone 1988; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* London: Routledge 1966; Roger Callois, *L'Homme et le sacré*, Paris: Gallimard 1950; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press 1984; Max Gluckman, "The License in Ritual," in his *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Oxford: Blackwell 1960; Peter Stallybrass and F.J. Gillen, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986.

attacked as the worst confusion of sensuality and religion, and thus as the clearest symptom of the degeneration of Hinduism in modern times. It is "Hinduism arrived at its last and worst stage of medieval development," as Sir Monier-Williams put it.⁴ Yet rather remarkably, in most of the contemporary popular literature, Tantra is now praised as a joyous celebration of the sensual body, offering a much-needed liberation of the body and sexuality. For most American readers today, Tantra is commonly defined simply as "spiritual sex," or the use of sexual pleasure as a means to religious experience, and has as such been celebrated as a wonderfully transgressive spiritual path for a repressive Western society.⁵

And yet, as André Padoux has pointed out, the category of Tantra — imagined as a singular, unified, coherent tradition — is itself a relatively recent creation. It is, in fact, largely the production of Western scholars of the 19th century, who lumped together a wide array of diverse texts, traditions, and practices under the generic "ism" of Tantrism. And surely the equation of Tantra with "spiritual sex" is a very recent invention.⁶

So how, then, did Tantra come to be defined primarily as "spiritual sex" in the Western imagination? And why is it that Tantra has now become so popular in contemporary America, both in academic

⁴ M. Monier-Williams, *Hinduism*, London: SPCK 1894, 122–123.

⁵ On contemporary Western appropriations of Tantra, see Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism," *History of Religions* 39 (2000) 268–304.

⁶ "An objective assessment of Tantrism is not easy, for the subject is controversial and perplexing. Not only do . . . theorists give different definitions of Tantrism, but its very existence has sometimes been denied. . . . But it so happened that it was in texts known as *tantras* that Western scholars first described doctrines and practices different from those of Brahmanism . . . so the Western experts adopted the word Tantrism for that particular, and for them, repulsive aspect of Indian religion" (Padoux, "Tantrism, an Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, New York: MacMillan 1986, 14:271–272). For a detailed discussion of Western views of Tantra, see Urban, "The Extreme Orient: The Construction of 'Tantrism' as a Category in the Orientalist Imagination," *Religion* 29 (1999) 123–146.

discourse and in popular culture? Indeed, not only has Tantra become one of the fastest growing trends in South Asian studies, but it now also saturates popular culture and new age spirituality, so that we now find pop-stars like Sting practicing Tantric sex and claiming to achieve five hour long orgasms. One need only browse the shelves of any book store or surf the internet to find entire lines of books, videos and other “ceremonial sensual merchandise,” bearing titles like “Tantric sex for Couples” and the “Multi-Orgasmic Man.” Is all this simply a case of cross-cultural voyeurism? Or are we in fact caught up in networks of neo-colonial or neo-imperialist exchange, the ultimate impact of which we have not yet even begun to fathom?⁷

That brings me to the second thing I wish to examine here, the problem of comparison and cross-cultural dialogue. Comparison, it seems, has become something that is often talked about but rarely done in the academic study of religion. Indeed, scholars of religions often seem to be so wary of the darker political implications of comparison, its ties to colonialism, fascism and other errors of our forefathers, that we often feel too terrified to step outside our narrow areas of historical specialization.⁸ However, as Jonathan Z. Smith reminds us, we really cannot avoid doing comparison; it is a basic part of the way the human mind works, how we make sense of otherness and difference, including how

⁷ This question is the starting point for my new book, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming 2003). There is an endless array of such popular Tantric books and videos; see for example Nik Douglas, *Spiritual Sex: Secrets of Tantra from the Ice Age to the New Millennium*, New York: Pocket Books 1997, which includes an appendix with over 20 pages of Tantric web-sites on the Internet.

⁸ For discussions of the problems and promise of comparison, see Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000); Hugh B. Urban, “Making a Place to Take a Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith and the Politics and Poetics of Comparison,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 12 (2000) 339–378.

we understand other religions.⁹ So we might as well get on about doing it well and in an ethically responsible, politically self-conscious way.

Here I would follow the lead of Wendy Doniger, who suggests that comparison is perhaps best done not from the “top down” as a search for transcendent archetypes or universal patterns, in the style of Mircea Eliade; rather, it is more useful to begin from the bottom up, as it were, with more mundane physical things like the human body, food or sexuality.¹⁰ Moreover, the point of a good comparison is not to uncover some transcendent identity or hidden archetype connecting two phenomena; rather, comparison is better used like a good metaphor. As Smith puts it, comparison does not tell us “how things are,” but instead, like a metaphor, tells us how things might be *re-visioned* or *re-described*.¹¹ It is thus a tool or heuristic device that we use to shed light on particular theoretical problems in our academic imagining of religion.

⁹ “That comparison has at times led us astray there can be no doubt; that comparison remains the method of scholarship is likewise beyond question” (Smith, *Map is not Territory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978, 240–241).

¹⁰ As Doniger argues, “The great universalist theories were constructed from the top down: that is, they assumed certain continuities based about broad concepts such as . . . a High God or an Oedipal complex. . . . The method I am advocating is, by contrast, constructed from the bottom up. It assumes certain continuities not about overarching human universals but about particular narrative details concerning the body, sexual desire, procreation . . . and death, details which . . . are at least *less* culturally mediated than the broader conceptual categories of the universalists” (*The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth*, New York: Columbia University Press 1998, 59).

¹¹ “Comparison does not tell us how things ‘are’ . . . Like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be ‘redescribed’ in Max Black’s term. . . . A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge. . . . Comparison provides the means by which we ‘revision’ phenomena as our data . . . to solve *our* theoretical problems” (*Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990, 52). See also Fitz John Porter Poole, “Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986) 411–457; Urban, “Making a Place to Take a Stand,” 339–378.

So what I would like to do in this essay is to undertake a metaphoric comparison of my own, by juxtaposing two traditions that would seem on the surface to be quite radically different and widely separated both historically and geographically. I will begin with a discussion of Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, one of the most influential later Tantric authors, who lived and wrote in the 16th century Bengal. Here I will focus primarily on his esoteric ritual practices, and specifically, his use of transgressive bodily substances such as blood, semen and menstrual fluid. I will then use that as a metaphoric foil to shed light on the practices of one of the 20th century's most infamous and controversial figures: Aleister Crowley. Known in the popular press as the "Great Beast" and the "wickedest man in the world," Crowley was also one of the most important figures in the transmission of Tantra to the West. To conclude, I will suggest that this comparison sheds important light on the larger questions of secrecy and transgression in religion generally. Adapting some insights from Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, I will examine the role of transgression as a means of unleashing and harnessing an awesome source of power that lies within the physical cosmos, the human body and the social order alike. More important, however, I will also argue that transgression also operates in very different ways in these two cases; for the "power of the impure" always functions differently in relation to specific historical contests and political interests. Finally, I will suggest that this comparison also sheds some revealing light onto our own contemporary obsessions with sex, secrecy and transgression in late capitalist consumer society at the turn of the millennium.

I. The "Conservative Character" of Tantra: Impurity, Transgression and Sacrifice in Bengali Śākta Tantra

O Mother! at your holy lotus feet I pray that I have not transgressed all the Veda and Artha Śāstras and destroyed your worship; with this fear, I have revealed the meaning of many profound matters. Please forgive me for whatever sins I have incurred by revealing these secret things. . . . Forgive me, for, with an ignorant heart, I have revealed the most secret things of your Tantra.

Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra* (BTS 722)

O Devī, this *Kula-dharma* must always and in all places be carefully kept secret, like the child born of one's mother's paramour.

*Kulārṇava Tantra*¹²

The large body of diverse texts and traditions known as “Tantra” have long had a rather scandalous and controversial reputation in both the Indian and Western imaginations. Infamous for its use of normally prohibited substances like meat and wine and its explicit violation of class laws, Tantra has been alternately condemned and celebrated; once attacked by Christian missionaries and Hindu reformers as “an array of magic rites drawn from the most ignorant and stupid classes,”¹³ Tantra has in our own generation been praised as “a cult of ecstasy, focused on a vision of cosmic sexuality.”¹⁴ Although it has been defined in many different ways, Tantra centers in large part around the concept of *śakti* — power or energy, in all its many forms. *Śakti* is the power that creates, sustains and destroys the entire universe, but it is also the power that flows through the social and political world, as well. Tantric ritual seeks to harness and exploit this power, both as a mean to spiritual liberation and as a means to this-worldly benefits, such as wealth, fame and supernatural abilities. As Douglas Brooks summarizes, “The Tāntrika conceives of the world as power. The world is nothing but power to be harnessed.”¹⁵

¹² *Kulārṇava Tantra*, ed. Arthur Avalon, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas 1965, XI.84.

¹³ J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1920, 200.

¹⁴ Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, Greenwich: New York Graphics Society 1973, 9; cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, New York: Meridian Books 1956, 576. As Pratapaditya Pal observes, “We . . . have gone from one extreme to the other. While early scholars were unnecessarily apologetic about some of the sexual . . . practices of Tantra, modern scholars revel in the sexual aspects” (*Hindu Religion and Iconology According to the Tantrasāra*, Los Angeles: Vichitra Press 1981, vi).

¹⁵ Douglas Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India*, Albany: SUNY 1992, xix. See also Hugh B. Urban, “The Path of Power: Impurity, Kingship and Sacrifice in Assamese Tantra,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001) 777–816; Alexis Sanderson, “Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir,” in *The Category of the Person:*

One of the most important later figures in the later consolidation and systematization of Tantra was the 16th century *brāhmaṇ* from Bengal, Mahāmahopādhyāya Śrī Kṛṣṇānanda Vāgīśa Bhaṭṭācārya, better known simply as Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa.¹⁶ Kṛṣṇānanda is most famous as the author of the one of the largest and most important compendiums of Tantric practice entitled the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*, or the “Great Essence of the Tantras” (hereafter BTS), which is still today one of the most widely used texts for Hindu ritual and iconography.¹⁷ Despite its importance, this Sanskrit text has never been translated into any Western language — though this is perhaps due to the fact that it consists of over 700 pages of highly technical ritual details.

The social and religious context of 16th century Bengal was a shifting, rather volatile one, and in fact, a period that was not entirely favorable to Hindu *brāhmaṇ*s like Kṛṣṇānanda. Indeed, as the Bengali historian M.R. Tarafdar puts it, “Brahmanism was passing through a

Anthropological and Philosophical Perspectives, eds. M. Carrithers, S. Collins, and S. Lukes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985.

¹⁶ On Kṛṣṇānanda’s importance as an authority on ritual and iconography, see Chintaharan Chakravarti, *The Tantras: Studies in their Religion and Influence*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak 1963, 66–67. There is at present some debate over the precise dates of Kṛṣṇānanda’s life, some identifying him as a contemporary of Śrī Caitanya (d. 1533), some placing him in the first half of the 16th century and others putting him in the latter part of that century; however, the most common opinion is that the *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra* was composed sometime between 1585 and 1600. See S.C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in its Origin, Development and Influence*, New Delhi: Monohar 1992, 78–79; Pal, *Hindu Religion and Iconology*, 3ff.; D.C. Sircar, *The Śākta Pīṭhas*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas 1973, 74–80; Dineśandra Bhaṭṭācārya, “Āgamavāgīśa Bhaṭṭācāryer Kāl Nirṇaya,” *Prabāsī*, Bhadra (1948).

¹⁷ The oldest known manuscript of the *Tantrasāra* is dated Śaka 1554 (1632 CE). The text exists in numerous editions, most notably those of P. Tarkaratna (Calcutta 1927); S.C. Mukherjee (Calcutta 1928); Ramakumāra Rāya (Varanasi: Prācya Prakāśanā 1985); Sadāśiva Śāstrī (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 1990). For the purposes of this essay, I rely primarily on the Sanskrit and Bengali edition of Śrī Rasikamohana Caṭṭopādhyāya (Calcutta: Navabhārata Pub. 1982).

precarious state of existence.”¹⁸ Not only had Bengal been under Muslim rule for several hundred years, displacing *brāhmaṇic* authority and royal patronage, but a number of powerful, non-*brāhmaṇic* movements emerged in 16th century Bengal. Foremost among these was the popular devotional revival of Śrī Caitanya, who challenged the ritualism and elitism of *brāhmaṇic* orthodoxy, calling for a simple, personal and affective relationship with God. In response, many *brāhmaṇs* of that time, such as the great legal scholar, Raghunandana, had begun to promote an extremely rigid, socially conservative interpretation of Hindu law, in an apparent attempt to defend *brāhmaṇic* power from the rising threats of Islam and popular devotionalism. As Pratapaditya Pal concludes in his study of the *Brhat Tantrasāra*,

There was a need to adopt a strong orthodox line . . . because of the great social and religious changes . . . in Bengal. . . . The gradual disintegration of Buddhism . . . the appearance of the Muslims on the political scene and the conversion of masses of people to Islam . . . made it imperative for someone like Kṛṣṇānanda to make some effort to organize and stabilize the Hindu religion.¹⁹

One of the most striking things about Kṛṣṇānanda, however, is that he was both a highly respected Brahman, renowned as an expert on Hindu law, and a secret practitioner of the most esoteric and transgressive rituals of Tantra. In other words, he led a kind of double life, appearing in the exoteric public sphere as a pure Brahman and

¹⁸ M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1583 AD: A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan 1965, 186. On the Bhakti revival of Caitanya, its social implications and its appeal to the lower classes, see Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Cult of Bengal*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966, 41ff; S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press 1942, 29ff.

¹⁹ Pal, *Hindu Religion and Iconology*, 4–5. See also Bhabatosh Bhattacharya, “Raghunandana’s Indebtedness to His Predecessors,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 19, no. 2 (1953) 175–176.

in the esoteric private sphere as a *tāntrika*.²⁰ Like Raghunandana, Kṛṣṇānanda was also a respected *brāhmaṇ*, who was very much concerned with defending traditional *brāhmaṇic* authority.

One of the most powerful new challenges to emerge in this period was the devotional revival inspired by Caitanya, which also took his home town of Navadvīpa as one of its main centers of activity. In fact, there is a popular legend that Caitanya and Kṛṣṇānanda knew each other and developed a deep rivalry. According to this story, the two were fellow students at the grammar school of Gaṅgadāsa, and later, after they had each become prominent theologians, they met for a debate. Apparently, the Vaiṣṇava saint could not tolerate the Tantric teachings of Kṛṣṇānanda, for “Caitanya was so infuriated by the arguments of Kṛṣṇānanda that he attacked him with a stick and drove him away.”²¹ Whether or not this story is true, it is a telling commentary on the animosity between Śākta Tantra and Vaiṣṇava bhakti: “Śākta Tantrism had a hard fight against rival religious movements like the Vaiṣṇava revival. . . . The Vaiṣṇava revival became an ideological guide for protest against the bloody ritualism of the Śākta aristocrats.”²²

In marked contrast to most popular images of Tantra as a subversive, anti-social force, Kṛṣṇānanda presents a highly conservative view of Tantric practice. While he clearly advocates the use of the infamous five M's and bloody rites of animal sacrifice, he also has strict rules about who can and cannot participate and which rites are prescribed for particular social classes. There is a strong “double norm” at work in Kṛṣṇānanda's attitude toward gender and caste.²³ In the esoteric

²⁰ For good discussion of this sort of “double life” among other important *tāntrikas*, see Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, and Sanderson, “Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir.”

²¹ Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, 43.

²² Sanjukta Gupta, Teun Goudriaan, and Dirk Jan Hoens, *Hindu Tantrism*, Leiden: Brill 1979, 27.

²³ For a good discussion of a similar double norm at work in South Indian Tantra, see Douglas Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantra*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990: “Tantrism . . . does not intend to be revolutionary in the sense of establishing a new structure of social

realm of Tantric ritual, ordinary laws of class and purity seem to be suspended or even eradicated altogether: “In the use of wine and sexual intercourse,” Kṛṣṇānanda states, “one should make no distinction of caste” (BTS 697). Yet despite this seemingly egalitarian ideal, he also makes it clear that impure substances like wine and meat can only be consumed by non-twice born castes; above all, a *brāhmaṇ* must never compromise his purity by consuming meat or wine. “The offering of [wine] is only for *sūdras* . . . a *brāhmaṇ* should never offer wine to the Great Goddess. No *brāhmaṇ* . . . should ever consume wine or meat” (BTS 696). Moreover, he states quite clearly that women and *sūdras* have no right to any Vedic ceremonies (BTS 20f).

Many of Kṛṣṇānanda’s rituals center around explicit and calculated violations of conventional laws of purity. One of the most important Tantric rites — which is still today performed routinely in many parts of Bengal — is the rite of animal sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals, of course, goes at least as far back as the Vedas and was at one time the heart of *brāhmaṇic* ritual practice. However, the Tantric sacrifice would appear to deliberately transgress, violate and in many ways completely invert the model of sacrifice described in the Vedas. As Madeleine Biardeau has pointed out, the traditional Vedic sacrifice involved the offering of a pure victim, often identified with the primordial Man, Puruṣa, primarily to pure, male deities. The *tāntrik* sacrifice, conversely, is offered to the Goddess in her most frightening, terrible and violent forms as the one who combats evil and handles impurity, such as Durgā, the fierce battle queen, Kālī, the black mistress of Time and Death, and Chinnamastā, the Goddess who severs her own head as she stands upon a copulating couple.

[T]he Goddess — who calls battle the sacrifice of battle — fears neither blood nor wine. She fears neither impurity nor violence. . . . The violence of the goddess . . . becomes transformed in her ritual into blood sacrifice. . . . The low tasks are left

egalitarianism. . . . It opens its doors only to a few who . . . seek to distinguish and empower themselves” (70).

to the Goddess so that the purity of the god may be maintained, and extreme Śāktism, known as Tantrism, glorifies her.²⁴

The *Bṛhat Tantrasāra* is in fact one of the most important manuals on the iconography of the Goddess, particularly in her most powerful forms such as Dakṣiṇākālī and Śmaśāna Kālī—a terrifying Goddess who “always lives in the cremation ground” holding a “cup filled with wine and meat,” and a “freshly cut human head” while she “smiles and eats rotten meat” (BTS 461).

According to the classical paradigm of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, the animal to be sacrificed must be of one of the five pure, that is, domestic animals, namely: a man, a horse, a bull, a ram or a he-goat. It most emphatically should *not* involve wild, undomesticated, impure animals; in fact, if one does so, it is said that father and son will be set at odds and criminals will terrorize the countryside.²⁵ The Tantric sacrifice, conversely, often uses specifically impure victims; in fact, the buffalo, which is considered one of the most impure of animals, is one of the most common and most important sacrificial offerings in Tantric ritual:

The buffalo ... is a savage beast ... a stranger to human society and to the sacrificial world. Although the Vedic literature knows of it ... it does not count it among the permitted (domestic) animals offered in sacrifice. But it is apt, by this fact, to play the role of the principle that is antithetical to the Goddess, the incarnation of total evil.²⁶

²⁴ Biardeau, “Devi: The Goddess in India,” in *Asian Mythologies*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993, 98.

²⁵ Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste*, New York: Oxford University Press 1994, 250. “If [the priest] were to perform the sacrifice with the jungle animals, father and son would separate, the roads would run apart, the borders of two villages would be far distant, and ravenous beasts, man-tigers, thieves, murderers and robbers would arise in the jungles” (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 13.2.4.1–4).

²⁶ Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud, *Le Sacrifice dans l’Inde Ancienne*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 1976, 146–147. “This is far from the Vedic sacrifice. . . . The victim is an asura, an evil being whom one must get rid of. . . . The

Finally, the manner in which the victim is killed is also a deliberate violation of Vedic norms. In the Vedic rite, the animal must be killed in an unbloody manner, usually strangled with as little violence as possible. As J.C. Heesterman has argued, the later Vedic ritual tradition made a systematic effort to rationalize, marginalize and ultimately excise altogether the impure aspects of the sacrifice. In place of a violent bloody beheading, the later *brāhmaṇic* ritual centers around an unbloody, purified and sanitized system of ritual rules: "Death and disintegration have been eliminated. . . . Death has been rationalized away."²⁷ This is particularly clear, Heesterman suggests, in the treatment of the head in the Vedic rite; rather than a bloody beheading, the Vedic rite insists on a bloodless strangling outside the sacrificial enclosure.²⁸ Indeed, "the beheading of an animal is expressly said to be a demonic act."²⁹

In the Tantric sacrifice, conversely, the animal is beheaded in a quite bloody manner inside the sacrificial grounds, with a single blow to the neck. Indeed, the entire ritual focuses on the severed head

victim represents an evil that must be gotten rid of, and this evil seems to be associated with the Goddess" (Biardeau, "Devi: The Goddess in India," 97).

²⁷ J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985, 46.

²⁸ "What we know as Vedic sacrifice is not sacrifice tout court . . . on a par with its normal practice as we find it to the present day in India. . . . Usually the victim is immolated by cutting off the head. This was originally also the case in the Vedic sacrifice . . . but the Vedic texts explicitly reject this procedure. Instead they prescribe that the victim be killed by suffocation outside the sacrificial enclosure" (Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict*, 87).

²⁹ O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1976, 155. "It is forbidden to make offerings of the victim's head" (Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict*, 46; see SB 1.2.1.2). Curiously, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* does describe a ritual of burying five heads — the heads of a man, horse, ox, sheep and goat — in the five directions of the bottom layer of the fire altar (SB VIII.5.2.1). Heesterman argues that this is evidence of an older, pre-*brāhmaṇic* sacrifice based on violent beheading which was later rationalized and replaced by the non-violent ritual of the *brāhmanas* (*The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993, 73).

and the blood, which are then offered to the Goddess. According to Kṛṣṇānanda, the result of this violent, bloody offering of an impure victim is the unleashing of awesome spiritual power. Indeed, the sacrifice can be used not only to achieve any worldly benefit, such as wealth or fame, but also for more malevolent purposes. In fact, Kṛṣṇānanda devotes a good deal of attention to the infamous six acts of black magic, namely, *utsādana* (destruction), *vidveṣaṇa* (causing enmity), *māraṇa* (killing), *uccāṭana* (expulsion), *stambhana* (causing paralysis), *vaśīkaraṇa* (bringing under control), and *mahāhāni karaṇa* (causing great ruin) (BTS 505–509, 561–563). By unleashing the terrible power of the Goddess through sacrificial violence, the *tāntrika* can slay his enemies, enchant women and ultimately even “bring the entire region under control” (BTS 507f.). For example, Kṛṣṇānanda describes several procedures for disposing of one’s enemies, including blood sacrifice to the Goddess. The victim is explicitly identified with the enemy, and the bloody decapitation and dismemberment of the beast becomes the surest means to slay one’s political, military or financial opponent:

He should infuse it with the spirit of the enemy, saying, “this is my enemy whom I hate, in the form of this beast.” Reciting the mantra, “Destroy, O Great Goddess, *sphēṅ sphēṅ*, devour, devour!” he should place flowers on the head of the victim. . . . Reciting the mantra, “Āḥ Huṃ Phaṭ,” he should behead [the victim]. . . . [H]e should offer the blood and head to the Goddess Durgā. (BTS 509)

In sum, the Tantric sacrifice seems to involve a series of calculated, structural inversions of many older Vedic paradigms: an impure, wild victim is substituted for a pure one; a bloody beheading is substituted for a non-violent strangling; the wrathful, violent Goddess takes the place of the pure male God, etc. These could be outlined as described in Table 1.

However, the most powerful and explicitly transgressive Tantric rites are the secret left handed practices (*vāmācāra*), which involve the intentional manipulation of impure substances; these include the well-known “five M’s” (*pañcamakāra*), namely, meat (*māṃsa*), wine (*madya*), fish (*matsya*), parched grain (*mudrā*) and sexual intercourse

TABLE 1

	Vedic Sacrifice	Tantric sacrifice
Victim	Domestic animal	Wild animal
Status of victim	Pure	Impure
Means of killing	Unbloody strangling outside the ritual enclosure	Bloody beheading inside the ritual enclosure; offering of head and blood to the Goddess
Deity	Pure male deity	Goddess, handler of impurity

(*maithuna*) (BTS 698–703). And for Kṛṣṇānanda, the last of these appears to be the most important, occupying as it does the last 25 pages of his text (significantly more than any of the other Ms, which are treated fairly briefly). As Kṛṣṇānanda observes, “the pleasure derived from sexual union is of the nature of Supreme Bliss” (BTS 703). The ritual of *maithuna*, however, is a kind of deliberately inverted sexual act, which involves intercourse not only with high class partners but also with untouchables, prostitutes, and various other mixed and low classes (BTS 694).

From the standpoint of mainstream Hindu Bengali culture, of course, this mingling of unmarried partners in violation of class relations is the worst imaginable transgression. As Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas have observed in their study of Hindu life cycle rites (*saṃskāras*) in Bengal, proper marriage and sexual relations between compatible castes are crucial to the larger social order; the married couple is believed to be joined as one body, sharing the same bodily substances and so incorporated into the larger social body.³⁰ Thus, an improper relation or an improper combination of coded bodily substances such as semen and blood would threaten to upset the whole delicate balance of the social body; indeed, it has “the capacity to ruin the entire order of

³⁰ Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986, 23–47. “The marriage of man and woman ... makes their previously unrelated bodies the same body” (*ibid.* 23).

jātis in the community. . . . [T]he improper combination of coded bodily substances entailed the improper combination of worship and occupational substances as well.”³¹ Yet this in a sense the explicit point of the Tantric rite.

It is important to note, however, that Kṛṣṇānanda does in fact still maintain his highly conservative and elitist double norm even when it comes to the rite of *maithuna*. Thus, while he prescribes intercourse in violation of class laws for most practitioners, he also insists that *brāhmaṇs* should still have intercourse only with *brāhmaṇ* partners (BTS 694). In other words, his seemingly radical, transgressive rites are still in many ways careful circumscribed, particularly for those at the top of the social hierarchy, such as *brāhmaṇs* like himself.

Having consecrated the female partner as an embodiment of the Goddess, the *tāntrika* then engages in a ritualized form of intercourse that is explicitly compared to a sacrificial ritual: Unlike many later forms of Tantric practice, which involve non-ejaculation and retention of semen, Kṛṣṇānanda’s ritual reflects a different and probably older form of sexual practice, which even has precedents in early Vedic rites.³² Here the central act is the ejaculation of semen into the female vagina, which is likened to ladling the oblation onto the sacrificial fire.

As he releases his semen, he should say the great *mantra*, “Drunken, and clinging to the two hands of the Light and the Sky, *śrucā*! I make the offering of *dharma* and *adharma* into the blazing fire of the Self, *svāhām*!” . . . Sexual union is the libation; the sacred precept is the shedding of semen. (BTS 702)

The aim of the ritual, however, is not the conception of a child; rather, the goal is first to ejaculate into the vagina and then to carefully extract

³¹ Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1976, 52.

³² On this point see David Gordon White, “Tantric Sects and Tantric Sex: The Flow of Secret Tantric Gnosis,” in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson, New York: Seven Bridges Press 1999, 249–270. Sexual union is also compared to a sacrificial rite in much earlier texts such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* VI.4.12. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 254–255.

the combined semen and menstrual fluid, called the *kula dravya* or lineage substance.

In India generally, bodily fluids, and above all sexual fluids, are considered both powerful and potentially polluting, as the ambivalent leftovers that overflow the boundaries of the body. In the Tantric rite, however, the sexual fluids are the ultimate source of power. According to Kṛṣṇānanda, this *kula dravya* is the most awesome and dangerous of substances; in fact, he specifically refers to it using the term *ucchiṣṭa* — that is, the sacrificial “remnant” or “leftover.”

With the sacrificial elements, the semen, unbroken grains of rice, perfume, flowers, O Deveṣī, he should worship the Goddess in the vagina. . . . With incense, lamps and various food offerings, the Kula adept should honor her in various ways, and then he should [consume] the remnants [*ucchiṣṭa*] himself. (BTS 703)

As Charles Malamoud points out, *ucchiṣṭa* is a technical term used in the Vedic sacrifice to refer to that portion of the victim that is left over once all the offerings have been made. Like leftovers generally in India, it is considered impure and polluting; but at the same time, it is also considered to be the powerful “seed” that gives birth to the next sacrifice: “Power is . . . derived from forces that are contaminating; these forces belong to the violent substratum of chaos out of which the world has emerged. . . . The sacrifice produces new life — the divine seed — from the disintegration of a previous existence. . . . It is the impure remainder of the sacrifice that gives birth to the new life produced from death.”³³ The same aura of dangerous power surrounds the left-over of the Tantric rite or sexual sacrifice. If consumed outside the secret ritual, it will send one to the most terrible of hells: “Apart from the time of worship, one must never touch a naked Śakti. And apart from the period of worship, the nectar must never be drunk by adepts. Touching it, their lives are lost, and drinking it, they would go to hell. Thus is the Kula worship” (BTS 704); but once placed in

³³ David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in South Indian Śaiva Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, 347. See Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1996, 7–10.

a sacrificial vessel and consecrated by the Goddess, the *kula dravya* is transformed into divine nectar, *amṛta*. By consuming this nectar, he writes, the *tāntrika* will enjoy supreme bliss and fulfillment of all worldly and otherworldly desires.

Then with great effort, he must obtain the precious Kula nectar. For with that divine nectar, all [the gods] are pleased. Whatever the wise man desires, he will immediately attain. . . . Having purified the Kula substance, which has the nature of Śiva and Śakti, and having deposited this nectar of life, which is of the nature of the Supreme Brahman, in a sacrificial vessel, [he attains] the eternally blameless state free of all distinctions. (BTS 703)

At this point, one might begin to wonder: what does the female partner get out of all of this? What's in it for the woman? Ironically, Kṛṣṇānanda has relatively little to say about the woman. Although she is considered an embodiment of the supreme power of the Goddess and her body is infused with a variety of divine forces, she seems to have little role other than as a tool to be manipulated in esoteric ritual. Kṛṣṇānanda states quite clearly, in fact, that women and *sūdras* have no right to any Vedic ceremonies (BTS 20f.). In any case, although she is temporarily empowered in the esoteric space of the ritual, she must return to her usual place of submission in the public social world. She is, in a sense, the raw source of energy to be extracted and consumed by the male *tāntrika*, who realizes the awesome power of the Goddess within himself.³⁴

All of this, however, leaves us with a basic question: what is the point of all this transgression and inversion of normal laws? Above all, why would a respected male *brāhmaṇ* like Kṛṣṇānanda be interested in any of this? Well, it was at least in part, I would suggest, a response to the particular social and political situation in which he lived, during a period of Muslim rule, amidst the spread of rival religious movements that did not favor *brāhmaṇs* like Kṛṣṇānanda. As Douglas Brooks has

³⁴ On this point, see Urban, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengal*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001, ch. 2. As Brooks observes, "Women . . . are made subordinate to and dependent on males and their ritual role is . . . limited to being a partner for male adepts" (*Auspicious Wisdom*, 25–26).

argued in the case of South Indian Tantra, many conservative *brāhmaṇs* turned to these esoteric rituals at a time when their own traditional status and privileges were most threatened by rival religious and political forces. “Tantric ritual continues to provide a means by which Brahman society perpetuates the perception of itself as privileged in the midst of radical social changes that do not always privilege Brahmins.”³⁵ With its elaborate ceremony and sacrifices, Tantra thus *reaffirmed* the traditional of *brāhmaṇs* as ritual experts, at a time when it was most being called into question.

At the same time, however, Kṛṣṇānanda was also engaged in ritual manipulations of impurity, handling the dangerous power of polluting substances like buffalo blood, semen and menstrual fluids. As Mary Douglas observed in her classic study, *Purity and Danger*, “The danger risked by boundary transgression is power. The vulnerable margins which threaten to destroy order represent powers in the cosmos. . . . Ritual which can harness these . . . is harnessing power indeed.”³⁶ By systematically violating and deliberately inverting normal laws of purity, the *tāntrika* unleashes the terrible power of the Goddess in her most awesome forms, as the ultimate power that creates and devours the universe. In so doing, he also asserts his own super-human power to transcend the boundaries of pure and impure, clean and unclean, to overstep the limitations of the social order and physical universe alike. As Alexis Sanderson has argued in his study of Kashmir Śaivite Tantra, the aim of this transgression is precisely to attain a kind of “unfettered super-agency through the assimilation of their lawless power in occult manipulations of impurity.”³⁷

³⁵ Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 188. On this point, see also Hugh B. Urban, “Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South Indian Tantra and French Freemasonry,” *Numen* 44 (1997) 1–38.

³⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 190–191.

³⁷ Sanderson, “Purity and Power,” 200–201. “We witness the strategies by which . . . radical sects were brought in from the visionary fringes to . . . areas of orthodox self-representation. . . . [T]he visionary power of the heterodox self is recoded . . . to be inscribed *within* the orthodox social identity . . . in such a way that it reveals the

In sum, the esoteric rituals of Tantra are by no means always the subversive, anti-social force that most early European scholars believed them to be. At least in the case of Kṛṣṇānanda in 16th century Bengal, I would suggest, they played a highly *conservative* role.³⁸ These secret, transgressive rites were in fact a means to reassert his own elite power, precisely at a time when it was most threatened by rival religious and political forces.

II. *Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley and Western Sexual Magic*

The sexual act is a sacrament of Will. To profane it is the great offense. All true expression of it is lawful; all suppression or distortion of it is contrary to the Law of liberty.

Aleister Crowley, *The Law is for All*³⁹

What I would like to do now is jump forward about 400 years and to the other side of the planet, to look at the role of secret ritual and transgression in modern Western magic — and in particular, in the work of the notorious Great Beast, 666, Aleister Crowley. Infamous throughout the popular press as the “king of depravity, arch-traitor and drug fiend,” Crowley is today one of the most influential figures in the revival of Western occultism and neo-pagan witchcraft. Yet surprisingly, despite many popular and hagiographic works on Crowley, he has seldom been taken seriously by modern scholarship, and even scholars of Western esotericism have typically dismissed

latter as a lower nature within the one person. . . . The tradition sustains its ‘power’ behind the appearance of conformity” (*ibid.* 191).

³⁸ On this point, see Gupta et al., *Hindu Tantrism*: “Anti-caste statements should never be read outside their ritual context. Returned to ordinary life, no high caste Tantric would think of breaking social taboos. . . . The ritual egalitarianism of Tantrism in practice acted as a caste-confirming . . . force” (32). See also the works of Brooks and Sanderson cited above.

³⁹ Crowley, *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary on Liber AL Vel Legis sub figura CCXX, The Book of the Law*, Temple, AZ: New Falcon Publications 1996, 42. “We refuse to regard love as shameful and degrading. . . . To us it is the means by which the animal may be made the Winged Sphinx which shall bear man aloft to the House of the Gods” (*ibid.* 49).

him as either a demented pervert or a ridiculous crank.⁴⁰ However, as his most recent biographer, Lawrence Sutin, has persuasively argued, Crowley was far more than the satanic drug fiend attacked by the media; he was in fact a striking reflection of some of the most important literary, philosophical and cultural forces of the early 20th century.⁴¹ So what I hope to do here is to use my comments on Bengali Tantra as a metaphoric foil to shed some new light on Crowley and to suggest that there is perhaps some deeper method to his apparent madness.

Born in 1875, the son of a minister in the highly puritanical Plymouth Brethren sect, Edward Alexander Crowley expressed some of the deepest tensions within the British Victorian era as a whole. A child raised in strict Christian morality, he would later turn to the occult arts and to extremes of sexual excess. Well educated at Trinity College in Cambridge, Crowley inherited a large amount of money while still young and was therefore free for many years to pursue his passions of poetry, mountain-climbing and the occult arts. While still at Trinity, he would also adopt the name “Aleister” (an homage to the hero of Shelley’s poem, “Alastor, the Spirit of solitude”) and also publish his first book of poetry and his infamous erotic collection, *White Stains* (1898).

⁴⁰ For example, Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman’s volume on *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad 1992, makes not even a single reference to Crowley.

⁴¹ Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, New York: St. Martin’s Press 2000. In addition to Crowley’s own autobiography (*The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. John Symonds, New York: Hill and Wang 1969), there are many popular biographies; see John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, New York: Roy Pub. 1952; and *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, London: Frederick Muller, Ltd. 1958; Francis King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1977; Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: the Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley*, York Beach, ME: Weiser 1989. Crowley’s classic work on “Magick” generally is his *Magick in Theory and Practice*, New York: Castle Books 1960, though he wrote a huge amount of other works on the subject which cannot all be cited here.

Crowley's first initiation into the world of esotericism and magic occurred in 1898, when he was introduced to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. An eclectic order combining elements of Kabbalah, Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, the Golden Dawn attracted a number of famous artists and intellectuals of the day, including Irish poet, W.B. Yeats. Rather significantly, however, Crowley would leave the movement and become mired in a series of lawsuits after he published a full description of the most secret rites of the Golden Dawn in his own journal, *Equinox*.⁴² Revealing secrets, we will see, was something of an obsession for Crowley.

However, it was in 1904 that Crowley received his first great revelation and the knowledge that he was in fact to be the herald of a new era in history. According to his own account, his guardian angel, Aiwass, appeared to him dictated a text called the *Book of the Law* or *Liber AL vel Legis*.⁴³ According to the Book of the Law, we have now entered the third great age in history: the first aeon was that of Isis, based on matriarchy and worship of the mother goddess; the second aeon was that of Osiris, during which the patriarchal religion of suffering and death (namely Christianity) was dominant. Finally, with the revelation of the Book of the Law, the corrupt age of Christianity had come to an end, and a new aeon of the child, Horus, was born. The guiding principle of this new era is the law of Thelema, derived from Greek, meaning Will. According to Crowley's maxim: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." In place of servile submission to some imaginary God, the law of Thelema is the full affirmation of the Self and the free expression of the individual will: "The Law

⁴² Colin Wilson, *The Occult*, New York: Vintage Books 1973, 362.

⁴³ Actually, the revelation came first through Crowley's wife, Rose, during their trip to Cairo, when the voice of the god Horus allegedly began to speak through her. She later revealed that the being speaking through her was an emissary of Horus named Aiwass, and Crowley eventually claimed to have received the *Book of the Law* directly from Aiwass without Rose's mediation.

of Thelema avows and justifies selfish-ness; it confirms the inmost conviction of each one of us that he is the centre of the cosmos.”⁴⁴

Despite his claim that “every man and woman is a star,” however, Crowley’s ideal social order was far from egalitarian and in fact quite elitist. Rejecting the principles democracy and equality as effete, emasculated left-overs of Christianity, he asserted power of the strong over the weak, the aristocratic over the dull service masses. As he wrote in 1937, in his *Scientific Solution to the Problem of Government*, the true ruler has no use for absurdities such as *liberté, égalité, fraternité* or the assertion that all men are equal or that woman is equal to man:

The ruler asserts facts as they are; the slave has therefore no option but to deny them passionately, in order to express his discontent. . . . The Master (. . . the Magus) does not concern himself with facts . . . he uses truth and falsehood indiscriminately, to serve his ends. Slaves consider him immoral, and preach against him in Hyde Park.⁴⁵

Crowley had high hopes that his new law of Thelema would be adopted by the major political figures of his day and so become the foundation for a new social order of the future. According to his own notes, he believed that the nation that first accepted the Book of the Law would become the leading nation the world. In fact, he initially saw Hitler and the rising power of fascism as a possible vehicle for spreading his law of Thelema.⁴⁶ He read and made copious notes on Hitler’s own writings, which he found much in agreement with his

⁴⁴ Crowley, *The Confessions*, 873, 939. “The company of heaven is Mankind, and its unveiling is the assertion of the . . . godhead of every man and every woman!” (*The Law is for All*, 25).

⁴⁵ Crowley, *The Book of Lies, which is also falsely called Breaks*, New York: S. Weiser 1952, 100. “The only solution of the Social Problem is the creation of a class with the true patriarchal feeling” (*ibid.* 172).

⁴⁶ He was particularly fascinated by Hitler’s comment that, “Our revolution is not merely a political and social revolution; we are at the outset to form a tremendous revolution in moral ideas and in men’s spiritual orientation.” Crowley’s comment was simply: “AL, the whole book.” Similarly, next to Hitler’s statement, “After all these centuries of whining about the protection of the poor and lowly it is about time

Law of Thelema;⁴⁷ and he tried several times to have copies of his work placed in Hitler's hands, suggesting that it would provide "a philosophical basis for Nazism."⁴⁸ Quite remarkably, however, when his attempts to sway the Führer failed, Crowley would just as eagerly try to sell his Law of Thelema to the British government, as the most necessary way to counter the growing German threat.⁴⁹

The key to Crowley's Law of Thelema—and also the primary reason for the scandalous reputation that followed him—was his practice of sexual magic. For Crowley, sex is the most powerful force in human nature and the supreme expression of the will; but it has been stupidly repressed by the Church and so given birth to all manner of social and psychological ills:

Mankind must learn that the sexual instinct is . . . ennobling. The shocking evils which we all deplore are principally due to the perversions produced by suppressions. The feeling that it is shameful and the sense of sin cause concealment, which is ignoble and internal conflict which creates distortion,

we decided to protect the strong against the inferior," Crowley wrote an enthusiastic "Yes!" (Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 48).

⁴⁷ Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 376, 377.

⁴⁸ "One of my colleagues informed me . . . that the Fuhrer was looking for a philosophical basis for Nazi principles. . . . Some of my adherents in Germany are trying to approach the Fuhrer with a view to putting my Book of the Law in its proper position as the Bible of the New Aeon. I expect that you will be in close touch with the Chancellor . . . and I should be very grateful if you would put the matter before them. . . . Hitler himself says emphatically in *Mein Kampf* that the world needs a new religion, that he himself is not a religious teacher, but that when the proper man appears he will be welcome" (Crowley, Letter to George Sylvester Viereck, July 31, 1936 [O.T.O. Archives], cited in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 378).

⁴⁹ "The Law of Thelema is an altogether new instrument of Government, infinitely elastic, in the proper hands, from the very fact of its scientific rigidity. I offer this Law to His Most Gracious Majesty in my duty as a loyal and devoted subject and I suggest that it be adopted secretly by His Majesty's Government so that I may be supported by the appropriate services in my efforts to establishing this Law as the basis of conduct, to the better security and . . . government of the Commonwealth" (Crowley, "Propositions for consideration of H.M. [His Majesty's] Government," October 1936, quoted in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 380).

neurosis and ends in explosion. We deliberately produce an abscesses and wonder why it is full of pus, why it hurts, why it bursts in stench and corruption.

The Book of the Law solves the sexual problem completely. Each individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him. The one injunction is to treat all such acts as sacraments.⁵⁰

Crowley's sexual magic is itself a complex melding of both Eastern and Western traditions; in fact, Crowley would become one of the most important figures in the transmission of Tantra to the West — though with significant reinterpretations and transformations. As early as 1902, Crowley had been introduced to Tantra during his travels in India and Sri Lanka.⁵¹ But he would also combine his knowledge of Tantric practices with a very different tradition of sexual magic emerging in the West. Much of this derives from an American named Paschal Beverly Randolph, the son of a wealthy Virginian father and a slave mother, who lived from 1825–1875. A well-known spiritualist, Randolph also developed the most influential system of effectual alchemy or sexual magic in modern times. According to Randolph, the moment of orgasm is the most intense and powerful experience in human life, for it is the moment when the soul is suddenly opened to the divine realm and the breath of God infuses life into this world. In Randolph's words, "True sex power is God power."⁵² As such, the power of orgasm can be used

⁵⁰ Crowley, *Confessions*, 874–875; cf. *The Law is for All*, 51.

⁵¹ See Crowley, "The Temple of Solomon the King," *Equinox* I (4) (London 1910), 150. Crowley's main texts on sex magic include: *Of the Nature of the Gods*; *Liber Agape*, the *Book of the Unveiling of the Sangraal de Arte Magica*, and *Of the Homunculus*, most of which are included in Francis King, ed., *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.*, New York: Samuel Weiser 1973. On Crowley's possible Tantric influences, see Urban, "The Omnipotent Oom: Tantra and its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism," *Esoterica: The Journal of Esoteric Studies* 3 (2001) 218–259; Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 92, 127, 141, 188. As Symonds suggests, "His greatest merit was to make the bridge between Tantrism and the Western esoteric tradition and thus bring together Western and Eastern magical techniques" (Introduction to *The Confessions*, xxv).

⁵² Randolph, *The Ansairitic Mystery: A New Revelation Concerning Sex!*, Toledo: Toledo Sun, Liberal Printing House, n.d. [c.1873]), reprinted in John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth Century American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian*

for a variety of this-worldly and otherworldly ends: both to achieve mystical experience and to create magical effects, such as financial gain or winning the affections of straying lover.⁵³

Randolph's teachings on sex magic were then passed to a number of European secret societies and esoteric brotherhoods, the most important of which was the Ordo Templi Orientis or O.T.O., founded by Karl Kellner and Theodor Reuss in the late 19th century.⁵⁴ According to the Reuss, the secret of sexual magic is in fact the innermost heart of all esoteric traditions and the key to all occult mysteries. As the O.T.O. proclaimed in the journal, *Oriflamme*, in 1912,

One of the secrets which our order possesses in its highest grades is that it gives members the means to re-erect the temple of Solomon in men, to re-find the lost Word. . . . Our Order possesses the Key which unlocks all Masonic and Hermetic

and Sex Magician, Albany: SUNY 1997, 317. See also Randolph, *Eulis! The History of Love: Its Wondrous Magic, Chemistry, Rules, Laws, Modes and Rationale; Being the Third Revelation of Soul and Sex*, Toledo: Randolph Publishing Co. 1974; *Magia Sexualis*, Paris: Robert Telin 1931.

⁵³ Randolph lists over a hundred uses for sexual magic, which include everything from acquiring money to the secret of domestic happiness. One of the most striking features of Randolph's sexual magic is his insistence that both partners must have an active role and that both must achieve orgasm for the magic to be successful: "For the prayer to be effective the paroxysm of both is necessary. . . . [T]he woman's orgasms should coincide with man's emission, for only in this way will the magic be fulfilled" (*Magia Sexualis*, 76–78).

⁵⁴ Kellner claims to have been initiated by an Arab fakir and two Indian yogis, from whom he learned "the mysteries of yoga and the philosophy of the left hand path which he called sexual magic" (Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, 95). On Reuss and his knowledge of Tantra, see A.R. Naylor, ed., *Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley, O.T.O. Rituals and Sex Magick*, Thames: Essex House 1999. Peter Koenig argues that the O.T.O. was not founded by Kellner but only formed after his death under Reuss' leadership. Kellner was the head of a small group known as the "Inner Triangle" and did practice some quasi-Tantric rites in the attempt to create the "elixir, that is: male and female sexual fluids" ("Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.," available online at <http://www.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/spermo.htm>). On the O.T.O., see Peter-Robert Koenig, "The OTO Phenomenon," *Theosophical History* 4, no. 3 (1992) 92–98; Frater U.D., *Secrets of Western Sex Magic*, St. Paul: Llewellyn 2001, 3ff.

secrets, it is the teaching of sexual magic and this teaching explains all the riddles of nature, all Masonic symbolism and all religious systems.⁵⁵

Eventually, the O.T.O. would also develop a complex series of grades of initiation, the highest of which focused auto-erotic, heterosexual and homosexual magic.

Crowley became involved with the O.T.O. beginning in 1910, and would soon become its most infamous and influential leader. According to Crowley, sex magic is the most powerful of all magical operations, for it is the raw power of human creativity, which, when combined with the power of the human will, has the potential to bring into being anything that one desires:

[I]f this secret [of sexual magic] which is a scientific secret were perfectly understood, as it is not by me after more than twelve years' almost constant study and experiment, there would be nothing which the human imagination can conceive that could not be realized in practice. . . . If it were desired to have an element of atomic weight six times that of uranium that element could be produced.⁵⁶

Many of Crowley's sexual rites centered around explicit transgressions and calculated inversions of conventional morality and religious practice. For example, one of the most elaborate rituals that he de-

⁵⁵ *Oriflamme* (1912) 18, reproduced in R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America: Authentic and Spurious Organizations*, Quakertown: The Rosicrucian Foundation, n.d., II 541. For a good discussion of Reuss' sex magic, see Koenig, "Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.": "The whole body was considered Divine . . . and the sexual organs were meant to fulfill a peculiar function: a Holy Mass was the symbolic act of re-creating the universe. . . . Sexually joining is a shadow of the cosmic act of creation. Performed by adepts, the union of male and female approaches the primal act and partakes of its divine nature."

⁵⁶ Crowley, *The Confessions*, 767. Most of the sexual rites were revealed in the VIII, IX and XI of the O.T.O. degrees. As Koenig comments, "Crowley's VIIIth degree unveiled . . . that masturbating on a sigil of a demon or meditating upon the image of a phallus would bring power or communication with a divine being. . . . The IXth degree was labelled heterosexual intercourse where the sexual secrets were sucked out of the vagina and when not consumed . . . put on a sigil to attract this or that demon to fulfill the pertinent wish" ("Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.").

signed for the O.T.O. was a full scale Gnostic Mass—a complex, highly choreographed ceremony. In the course of the ritual, the semen and menses are symbolized by the sacred host, as the priest pierces the priestess with his “sacred lance,” symbolizing the supreme union of male and female energies.

In the Gnostic Mass, semen and menses—which may be transformed into physico-spiritual essences (the Great Work or Summum Bonum) by those in possession of the secret—are symbolized by the Priest (who bears ‘the Sacred Lance’) and the Priestess. . . . These two partake of the sacred Cake of Light and Cup of Wine. During the ritual, the Priest parts a sacred veil with his Lance and embraces the knees of the Priestess, who has removed her robes to embody the sacred nakedness of the Goddess.⁵⁷

However, Crowley’s most explicitly transgressive practices began in the years between 1920 and 1923, when he founded his own Abbey of Thelema at a farmhouse in Sicily. According to his diaries from this period, Crowley believed that he had transcended all moral boundaries and all material distinctions, such that even the most defiling of substances became for him divine. Thus, he describes one performance of his Gnostic mass in which the sacred Host was replaced with the excrement of his consort, Leah Hirsig, which she then forced him to eat as the true Body of God. As Crowley recounts,

My mouth burned; my throat choked, my belly wretched; my blood fled wither who knows. . . . She ate all the body of God and with Her soul’s compulsion made me eat. . . . My teeth grew rotten, my tongue ulcered, raw was my throat, spasm-torn my belly, and all my Doubt of that which to Her teeth was moonlight and to her tongue ambrosia; to her throat nectar, in her belly the One God.⁵⁸

On another occasion, Crowley describes the performance of a blood sacrifice involved both ritual and sexual transgression. The ceremony

⁵⁷ Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 234. See also Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA, Book Four Parts I–IV*, York Beach: Samuel Weiser 1997, 267–269, and Theodor Reuss’ translation of Crowley’s Gnostic Mass: “Die Gnostische Messe,” in P.R. Koenig, *Der Grosse Theodor Reuss Reader*, Munich 1997.

⁵⁸ John Symonds and Kenneth Grant, eds. *The Diaries of Aleister Crowley: The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, London: Duck Editions 2001, 235.

was to consist in the beheading of a goat at the very moment that it ejaculated as it had intercourse with his Scarlet Woman, so that the drinking of its blood could be a true “drinking thereof from the Cup of our Lady of Whoredom.”⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the goat seemed uninterested in performing the sexual part of the ritual, and Crowley was forced to complete that portion himself.

Clearly, Crowley was going somewhat against the grain of the conventional values of the Victorian world in which he was born. As Patricia Anderson observes in her study of 19th century British sexual attitudes, much of the discourse of the Victorian era was particularly focused on the importance of heterosexual marriage for the stability of society; in an era that valued economic productivity, generation of capital and restraint in consumption, healthy sexuality had to be useful, productive and efficient: “normal heterosexuality appeared in one guise . . . attraction between men and women that led to marriage and family. Normal sex was consistent with the values of Victorian industrial society—it was another mode of production.”⁶⁰ Crowley, it would seem, set out deliberately to destroy that useful, productive social order through the most extreme acts of consumption and excess.

Despite their deliberately shocking and offensive character, however, Crowley’s rituals were by no means simple orgiastic hedonism or mindless antinomianism. On the contrary, these were elaborate, choreographed ceremonies that required the strict observation of laws of sanctity before the explosive energy of transgressive violence and sexuality could be unleashed. These were rites that depended, not unlike the Śākta Tantric rituals, on a clear logic of structural inversion and systematic violation of basic social categories. Thus, the Christian bread and wine are replaced by semen and menstrual blood; the

⁵⁹ Crowley, July 19, 1921 diary entry, O.T.O. archives, quoted in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 293.

⁶⁰ Patricia Anderson, *When Passion Reigns: Sex and the Victorians*, New York: Basic Books 1995, 17–18. See also John Maynard, “Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion,” *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 19 (1987) 61.

body of Christ is replaced by the excrement of a woman; conventional marriage and intercourse are replaced by bestiality and blood sacrifice.

Much like the Bengali *tāntrikas*, moreover, Crowley found in these explicit acts of transgression the key to a tremendous source of power. Through these occult manipulations of impure substances, such as semen, blood, and excrement, he claimed to have unleashed a magical will that could fulfill any spiritual or material desire, from intercourse with the gods to financial well-being. (In fact, many of his sexual magical operations were performed with the explicit aim of coming up with some quick cash when he had begun to deplete his bank account).⁶¹

A Sorcerer by the power of his magick had subdued all things to himself. . . . He could fly through space more swiftly than the stars. Would he eat, drink, and take his pleasure? There was none that did not obey his bidding. In the whole system of ten million times ten million spheres upon the two and twenty million planes he had his desire.⁶²

In his most exalted moments, Crowley believed that he could achieve a supreme spiritual power: the power to conceive a divine child or spiritual fetus that would transcend the mortal failings of the body born of a mere woman. This goal of creating an immortal child, Crowley suggests, lies at the heart of many esoteric traditions through history:

This is the great idea of magicians in all times: To obtain a Messiah by some adaptation of the sexual process. In Assyria they tried incest . . . Greeks and Syrians mostly bestiality. . . . The Mohammedans tried homosexuality; medieval philosophers tried to produce homunculi by making chemical experiments with semen. But the root idea is that any form of procreation other than normal is likely to produce results of a magical character.⁶³

⁶¹ Crowley suggests that, among other things, one might use sexual magic to “perform an operation to have \$20,000,” by focusing all one’s will upon an object at the moment of orgasm, one can powerfully influence the course of events and achieve the desired goal (Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, 141–142).

⁶² Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 63.

⁶³ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent 1911, 385–386. On the creation of alchemical androgynes, see Urban, “Birth Done

In sum, the secret of sexual magic has the potential to unleash a power of truly messianic proportions, a power that heralds the dawn of the new aeon.

As we can see in this passage, Crowley seems to have regarded women as rather limited and ultimately expendable companions in spiritual practice. Though he used a variety of female partners or “Scarlet women” in his magical rites, he seems to have regarded the highest stages of practice as rituals of homosexual intercourse.⁶⁴ He was, moreover, notorious for his psychological and physical exploitation of women, and for his generally condescending, at times quite misogynistic attitude toward women generally. As he put it, “women, like all moral inferiors, behave well only when treated with firmness, kindness and justice.”⁶⁵

III. The Power of the Impure: The Play of Taboo and Transgression

In the region where the autonomy of the subject breaks away from all restraints, where the categories of good and evil, of pleasure and pain, are infinitely surpassed . . . where there is no longer any form or mode that means anything but the instantaneous annihilation of whatever might claim to be a form or mode, so great a spiritual energy is needed that it is all but inconceivable. On this scale, the chain releases of atomic energy are nothing.

Bataille, *The Accursed Share*⁶⁶

Better: Conceiving the Immortal Fetus in India, China and Renaissance Europe,” in *Notes on a Maṇḍala: Essays in Honor of Wendy Doniger*, ed. Laurie Patton, New York: Seven Bridges Press 2002.

⁶⁴ On Crowley’s views toward homosexuality, see Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 183–184. Thus the highest XI degree of Crowley’s O.T.O passed beyond the stages of auto-erotic and heterosexual practice to that of homo-erotic practice. See Konig, “Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.”; Frater U.D., *Secrets of Western Sex Magic*, 138.

⁶⁵ Crowley, *Confessions*, 370. Elsewhere he notes, “Women are nearly always conscious of an important part of their true Will, the bearing of children. To them nothing else is serious by comparison” (*The Law is for all*, 133). See also Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 359, 199, 329–330.

⁶⁶ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 183–184.

Secrecy lies at the very core of power.

Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*⁶⁷

I would like to pause here and offer some comparative reflections on these two examples of Bengali Tantra and modern Western magic, widely separated as they are both historically and geographically. Obviously, I am by no means suggesting that these two cases are in any way the same, nor I am suggesting that they are each temporal reflections of some transcendent archetype or universal pattern. Rather, beginning from the ground up instead from the top down, I am suggesting that they are each manipulating the body and physical substances in ways that shed some useful light on one another. By juxtaposing these two cases like a metaphor, playing upon both their striking differences and their surprising similarities, I think we can gain new insight into both phenomena, as well as new light on a larger theoretical problem in the study of religion. The result, I hope, is something like what Paul Ricoeur calls the experience of *semantic shock*, or the sudden flash of insight that results from a truly striking metaphor.⁶⁸

In both the cases of Śākta tantra and Crowleyian magic, we find esoteric rituals that center in large part around the manipulation of bodily substances that are normally considered impure and defiling, such as blood, semen, menses and excrement; both involve systematic violations and structural inversions of ordinary laws of purity and ritual sanctity, through violence, bloodshed and sexual transgression; and both do so with the primary goal of unleashing an awesome source of power that shatters the boundaries of the mundane physical world and social order alike.

Here I would like to adapt but also critically modify some of the ideas of Georges Bataille, who has written some of the most widely

⁶⁷ Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, New York: Viking Press 1962, 290.

⁶⁸ "The strategy of metaphorical discourse is aimed not at facilitating communication . . . but rather at challenging and even shattering our sense of reality through reflective redescription" (*A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdes, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991, 32).

influential work on the concept of transgression. As Bataille suggests, transgression is not a matter of simple hedonism or unrestrained sexual license. Rather, its power lies in the dialectic or play (*le jeu*) between taboo and transgression, sanctity and sacrilege, through which one systematically constructs and then oversteps all laws. It is thus analogous to eroticism. Not a matter of simple nudity, eroticism arises in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, clothing and striptease, between the creation of sexual taboos and the exhilarating experience of overstepping them. So too, in ecstatic mystical experience or religious rites, such as blood sacrifice, carnivals, etc., one must first create an aura of purity before one can defile it with violence, transgression and the overturning of law. "The prohibition is there to be violated";⁶⁹ for it is the experience of over-stepping limits that brings the blissful sense of continuity and communion with the other. As Bataille comments, quoting Marquis de Sade,

It is always a temptation to knock down a barrier. Fear invests [the forbidden act] with an aura of excitement. There is nothing, writes de Sade, that can set bounds to licentiousness. The best way of enlarging and multiplying one's desires is to try to limit them.⁷⁰

For Bataille, the ultimate aim of transgression is not mere sensual pleasure, rather it is the transgression of the very boundaries of the self, the expenditure without hope of return, which shatters the limits of the finite human consciousness and merges it with the boundless continuity of the infinite. It is this experience of transgression and radical expenditure that links eroticism to the ultimate experience of infinite continuity, that of death itself. As Bataille concludes, "Eroticism is assenting to life up to the point of death."⁷¹ This

⁶⁹ Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, San Francisco: City Lights 1986, 64. For other important discussions of transgression, see Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 89–111; *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1985, and *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2001, 26–75, 133–152, 185–195.

⁷⁰ Bataille, *Erotism*, 48.

⁷¹ Bataille, *Erotism*, 1.

fusion of death and sensuality in the act of transgression is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the *tāntrik* image of Chinnamastā — the Goddess who severs her own head and stands upon a copulating couple — or in Crowley's ritual of beheading a goat as it engages in intercourse with a woman.

However, while I find Bataille's comments on transgression generally useful, I would also like to extend and critique them in two ways. First, I want to look more closely at the role of secrecy in all of this: how does concealment function in relation to transgressive ritual practice? There is of course the obvious fact that some of these activities — such as consuming menstrual blood or copulating with goats — are not entirely acceptable by either Hindu or Victorian British social standards and could only take place behind closed doors. But more importantly, I would suggest, secrecy also serves to *intensify and optimize* both the taboo and the transgression, both the laws that forbid such acts in the public world and the titillating power derived from violating them in esoteric ritual. As Michael Taussig nicely put it,

What is essential to realize is how secrecy is intertwined with taboo (and hence transgression) to create a powerful yet invisible presence (indeed, the presence of presence itself) and how essential this is to what we mean by religion.⁷²

For secrecy *magnifies* the aura of dangerous mystery that surrounds the prohibition, and so also the explosive power that results from violating it.⁷³ Secret ritual, we might say, functions like a kind of spiritual slingshot, which is first stretched as tightly as possible and then suddenly released, in order to propel one into ecstatic liberation. Or to use perhaps an even more apt metaphor, the transgressive ritual acts like a form of *socio-nuclear fission*; that is to say, it first *exaggerates*

⁷² Taussig, "Transgression," 355.

⁷³ "Secrecy (that lies at the very core of power) [is] a potent stimulus to creativity, to what Simmel called the magnification of reality, by means of the sensation that behind the appearance of things there is a deeper, mysterious reality that we may here call the sacred, if not religion" (Taussig, "Transgression," 356); see also Georg Simmel, "Secrecy," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff, New York: Free Press 1950.

and then *shatters* the laws that make up the social organism at its most fundamental atomic level, thereby releasing an explosive burst of energy.

Second, I would also like to suggest some criticisms of Bataille's model of transgression, which is, I think, ultimately inadequate. For what Bataille does not really acknowledge is that transgression is very often tied, not just to ecstatic mystical experience or the liberating bliss of expenditure, but also to real and often asymmetrical relations of power. In particular, Bataille glosses over the fact that transgression does not benefit all individuals equally; for while it may be empowering and liberating for some individuals, it is often oppressive and exploitative for others.⁷⁴ Indeed, in his major work on economic and political history, *The Accursed Share*, Bataille seems to have a kind of romantic nostalgia for the good old days of human sacrifice and ritual warfare, before the ecstatic power of transgressive violence was co-opted by modern capitalism. Thus he describes the practice of human sacrifice among the Aztecs as a cruel but divinely motivated search for continuity, which actually frees the victim from his finite, isolated individuality and merges him with the boundless continuity of death:

[I]n his cruel rites, man is *in search of a lost intimacy*. . . . Religion is this long effort and this anguished quest: it is always a matter of detaching from the *real* order, from the poverty of things, and of restoring the *divine* order. . . . The meaning of this profound freedom is given in destruction, whose essence is to consume profitlessly whatever might remain in the progression of useful works. Sacrifice destroys that which it consecrates.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Not unlike the Śākta *tāntrikas*, and not unlike Crowley, Bataille sought a kind of Nietzschean transvaluation of all values, transcending the limited moral boundaries of good and evil. In contrast to the "popular morality" of the servile and the meek, Bataille called for a form of "sovereign" and ecstatic experience, through "intoxication, erotic effusion, laughter, sacrificial effusion [and] poetic effusion." Such sovereign and ecstatic experiences are attained specifically by means of destruction and violence, the shattering of ethical and physical boundaries, with or without the consent of that which is destroyed: "In laughter, sacrifice or . . . eroticism, effusion is obtained through a modification, willing or not, in the order of objects . . . [S]acrifice, in general, destroys beings" (*The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 94).

⁷⁵ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 57–58.

In contrast to Bataille, I would emphasize that transgressive acts such as sacrifice and sexual rituals are typically empowering and liberating only for certain individuals, and often oppressive and even exploitative for others. In both the cases of Bengali Tantra and Crowleyian magic, the transgressive rites were in fact quite androcentric, arguably misogynistic and exploitative of the female body. Both, moreover, used esoteric ritual as a means of asserting an essentially patriarchal, elitist social vision, in which the supreme power belongs to the few who possess secret knowledge and dare to overstep the moral boundaries that confine ordinary human beings. In sum, they each exercised a basic double-norm: on the one hand, they asserted the essential divinity of all human beings and even celebrated the divine status of women and lower classes in the realm of secret ritual; yet they also ultimately re-asserted the superior status of a small group of elites, those few initiates who are strong enough to handle this powerful but dangerous esoteric knowledge.

As in the case of any good metaphor, however, this comparison has also highlighted some important differences between these two examples. For this has also been, in effect, an *historical comparison* — that is, an examination of how certain religious ideas are transformed or reinterpreted when they pass from one social and historical setting to another. Perhaps most importantly, Kṛṣṇānanda's secret rituals were, at least in part, an attempt to reassert his own *brāhmanic* status and to reinforce a traditional, class-based social hierarchy in the face of a changing historical context. For Kṛṣṇānanda, strict secrecy was a necessary part of his need to conceal a private realm of transgressive ritual, while protecting his status in mainstream society. Crowley, conversely, proclaimed the destruction of an older religious and social order, which would give birth to a new aeon, with the new Law of Thelema. For Crowley, sexual rituals were the ultimate symbol of his rejection of traditional Christianity morality and his assertion of the godhood of the individual Will. At the same time, Crowley took an apparent delight in revealing secrets, publicly proclaiming his violation of morality and convention. For Crowley, who was always something of an exhibitionist, the ultimate transgression was that of revealing the most terrify-

ing secrets in order to shock the world. In sum, both Kṛṣṇānanda and Crowley employed strikingly similar kinds of esoteric rituals, based on explicit acts of transgression and manipulation of impure bodily substances; yet they did so for very different, apparently opposite, reasons — the one to reinforce the status quo, and the other to demolish it.

Conclusions and Comparative Comments

We have not in the least liberated sexuality, though we have . . . carried it to its limits: the limit of consciousness, because it ultimately dictates the only possible reading of our unconscious; the limit of the law, since it seems the sole substance of universal taboos.

Michel Foucault⁷⁶

To conclude, I would like to offer some broader comparative comments on the impact of Tantra and Crowleyian magic on America today. In the years since his death, Crowley's sexual magic has become increasingly influential in American pop-culture and new religious movements; in fact, it has also been increasingly combined with, perhaps hopelessly confused with, Indian Tantric traditions. Most of the popular books now being sold under the label of "Tantra" are really for the most part meldings of Crowleyian sex magic with Indian erotic manuals such as the *Kāma Sūtra* (which in fact has virtually nothing to do with Tantra), usually with a healthy dash of the *Joy of Sex* thrown in.⁷⁷ As one enthusiastic neo-Tāntrik guru, Swami Nostradamus Virato, puts it, "the art of Tantra could be called spiritual hedonism, which says eat drink and be merry but with full awareness!"⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 57. On the point, see also Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 408.

⁷⁷ There is a vast array of such books; see for example: Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*; Christopher S. Hyatt, and Lon Milo Duquette, *Sex Magic, Tantra and Tarot: The Way of the Secret Lover*, New Falcon Pub. 1991; Christopher S. Hyatt and S. Jason Black, *Tantra Without Tears*, New Falcon Pub. 2000; Donald Michael Kraig, Linda Falorio, Tara Nema, *Modern Sex Magick: Secrets of Erotic Spirituality*, St. Paul: Llewellyn Pub. 1998.

⁷⁸ Swami Nostradamus Virato, "Tantric Sex: A spiritual Path to Ecstasy," reprinted on the "Church of Tantra" Website (<http://www.tantra.org>).

Indeed, the phrase “American Tantra” is now even a registered trademark, representing a whole line of books, videos and other products through its on-line gift shop.

Thus the category of Tantra is a striking illustration of the strange global circulation of religious ideas, the dialectical play of representations and misrepresentations at work between cultures in our own era of globalization and transnationalism. In the course of its complex journey to the West, Tantra has been progressively transformed from something concerned primarily with secrecy and power to something concerned primarily with sensual pleasure and a liberation of sexuality for a repressive western world. Indeed, even the transgressive power of Tantric ritual itself has now been transformed into a series of commodities that one can purchase on-line — for example, through Tantra.com’s E-sensual’s catalogue, which offers a complete “Tantric Pleasuring Package” for a mere \$198.⁷⁹ As such, Tantra has emerged as a new spiritual form remarkably well adapted to the current social-economic situation — the situation that some have described as post-Fordism, post-industrial society, disorganized capitalism or late capitalism.⁸⁰ As Bryan S. Turner, Mike Featherstone and others argue, the late 20th century witnessed a significant shift from an earlier mode of capitalism — based on the Protestant ethic of inner-worldly asceticism, hard work, thriftiness and accumulation — to a new form of late capitalism or postindustrial society — based on mass consumption, physical pleasure and hedonistic enjoyment. In consumer culture the body

⁷⁹ <http://www.tantra.com/tantra2/index.html>. On this point, see Urban, “The Cult of Ecstasy,” and *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power*, chapter 6. For “American Tantra™” see Paul Ramana Das’ and Marilena Silbey’s web-site “Third Millennium Magic” (<http://www.3mm.com>).

⁸⁰ On the concept of late capitalism, see Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York: Basic Books 1973; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press 1991; Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity 1987; William Halal, *The New Capitalism*, New York: Wiley 1986; Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, London: NLB 1975; Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, London: Blackwell 1989.

ceases to be an unruly vessel of desire that must be disciplined and subjugated; rather, the body is the ultimate source of gratification and fulfillment. "The new consumptive ethic . . . taken over by the advertising industry celebrates living for the moment, hedonism, self-expression, the body beautiful, progress, freedom from social obligation."⁸¹ With its ideal wedding of spirituality and physical pleasure, divine transcendence and sexual indulgence, these new forms of Tantra/Sex Magick are a striking illustration of what we might call "*the spiritual logic of late capitalism*."

As such, I would suggest that Crowley and his contemporary are a particularly clear example of what Michel Foucault has called the "repressive hypothesis" — namely, the belief that sexuality has been prudishly repressed by western society and that what is most needed now is an ecstatic liberation of our true sexual nature. Yet in fact, Foucault argues, we have perhaps not so much "liberated" sexuality in any radical new way, but rather simply continued a long history of preoccupation with and discourse about sexuality, which has been described, debated, classified and categorized in endless, titillating detail. "What is peculiar to modern societies," he writes, "is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as *the secret*."⁸² Yet what we *have* perhaps done is to push sex to the furthest possible extremes — to extremes of transgression and excess, not resting until we have shattered every law, violated every taboo:

⁸¹ Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage 1990, 114. As Turner comments, "The new leisure consumption and body-beautiful culture stimulate a whole new market around hedonistic personal life-styles, making the body a target of advertising and consumer luxury. . . . In the growth of a consumer society with its emphasis on the athletic/beautiful body we see a major transformation of values from an emphasis on the control of the body for ascetic reasons to the manipulation of the body for aesthetic purposes" (*Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*, London: Routledge 1992, 164–165, 47).

⁸² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, New York: Vintage 1978, 35.

The twentieth century will undoubtedly have discovered the related categories of exhaustion, excess, the limit and transgression — the strange and unyielding form of these irrevocable movements which consume and consummate us.⁸³

To close I would like to quote a passage from Leslie Shepherd, who edited Crowley's infamous semi-autobiographical novel, *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*. Crowley and his sexual practices, Shepherd suggests, are perhaps an allegory for modern Western society as a whole, and perhaps foreshadowed the consumptive, destructive, transgressive forces in late capitalist society at the turn of the millennium. "It is just as well that Crowley was ahead of his time; had he been unleashed today," amidst our own obsessions with sex and transgression in contemporary consumer society, "he might have taken the world by storm."⁸⁴ Perhaps there is still a good chance that he might.

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⁸³ Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 69.

⁸⁴ Shepherd, Introduction to *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, Hyde Park: University Books 1970, vii–viii.

ETHNOHERMENEUTICS AND WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS IN THE STUDY OF HOPI INDIAN RELIGION¹

ARMIN W. GEERTZ

Summary

Ethnohermeneutics grew out of the ethnosciences' emphasis on discourse analysis, componential analysis and cultural grammar. Ethnohermeneutics as interpreted in this article closely follows developments in symbolic anthropology, cognitive anthropology and semiotics. Ethnohermeneutics attempts to locate the scholar and the people under study in each their own network of discourses, traditions, texts and meanings in the context of their social and intellectual circumstances. The result is a third perspective whereby the frames of reference of the scholar and the people under study are transcended. In this article, four functions of this approach are illustrated in relation to the study of Hopi Indian religion.

In recent decades, study of the religions and cultures of indigenous peoples has experienced a revolution that has not yet reached its culmination. In connection with the assertion of ethnic identity and an attempt to regain control of their own history, indigenous intellectuals, artists, authors and government leaders have aggressively pursued policies of intellectual and cultural property rights. The key issues are Western hegemony, language, place and displacement, racism and sexism. This struggle, however, carries its own paradoxes. One of these paradoxes is that those who bare the brunt of the aggression are not necessarily the enemy. I am referring, of course, to scholars in ethnography, sociology, psychology and the study of religion. An important element of the paradox is that Western scholarship has been busily deconstructing itself since the late 1960s because of insights

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper entitled "Theory and Ethics in the Study of Hopi Indian Religion" presented at the *20th American Indian Workshop* on "Native American Religions," Lund University, April 26–28, 1999. The paper is based on an article in Danish (Geertz 1998, rpt. 2001).

and criticisms raised by philosophers, feminists, orientalism critics, discourse analysts and indigenous scholars. A second element of the paradox is that portions of the general public, especially in the United States, but also in Europe, have submitted to a combination of pangs of conscience and a rampant primitivism. Primitivism is the romantic idea that the most excellent condition of human life has occurred in the distant past — called *chronological primitivism* — or in the cultures and lives of contemporary indigenous peoples — called *cultural primitivism*. Primitivism has existed in Europe since antiquity, and it continues as one of the mainstays of philosophy, history, the sciences, literature and art in Europe and the U.S.² It is clearly the main assumption of New Age indianism as well.

The post-colonial discourse of indigenous intellectuals has been involved in a revisioning of received tropes and a rereading of canonical texts, but also in a “radical dismantling of the European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses,” as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have pointed out in their essay collection *The Empire Writes Back*.³ Thus, indigenous intellectuals have been turning their subordinate position into a dominant position, and many non-indigenous scholars have either become involved in the revisionism, when allowed, or been intimidated and moved on to other things. Even though I sympathize with the self-critical awareness and attempts to solve the human and ethical problems in the study of religion, I do not sympathize with new forms of oppression nor with the destruction of the study of religion as an academic discipline. There are many moral and ethical issues that in the heat of the argument have been confused with methodological and theoretical issues.

Such a complex situation requires a plurality of approaches. During the past 15 years or so, I have been promoting three main theoretical and methodological approaches to alleviating some of the problems. The key to all of them is the ideal of dialogue partners taking each other seriously on an equal basis as mutually fallible human beings.

² See my coming paper Geertz n.d.

³ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989:194–195.

Neither primitivism nor occidentalism serve any useful purpose here, there is only room for a no-nonsense exchange of knowledge about what religious people believe and how they behave. Thus my first approach can be called an *iconoclastic pedagogics* which dismantles the stereotypes in Western literature, art, movies and scientific literature and rebuilds understanding on the basis of accurate ethnography, authentic familiarization with the worldviews and traditions of particular religions and attempts to relate indigenous issues with issues in the study of religion.

My second approach addresses the need to take on the issues of postmodern criticism in order to reconstruct a basis for scholarly consensus in a pluralistic context. Here I join Dutch anthropologist Anne-miek Richters who promotes a *radicalized Enlightenment*. The basic assumption is that with the complete abandonment of meta-narratives (human rights, democracy, rationality, progress) how can oppression in any guise be resisted? There are bad kinds of universalism, but there certainly are also bad kinds of particularism.⁴

My third approach is what I call *ethnohermeneutics*. It is similar to dialogical anthropology in that it attempts to locate both researcher and human subjects in each their net of texts, traditions, meanings, and social and intellectual circumstances. Ethnohermeneutics tries to widen the circle a bit by drawing its inspiration from the textual sciences and the ethnosciences. Together with a methodological pluralism, this approach produces a third perspective which transcends scholar and human subject, a perspective rightly called an agnostic pluralism by the Sudanese orientalism critic Abdelwahab El-Affendi.⁵

Ethnohermeneutics

Students of indigenous religions must of necessity apply methods and theories from a variety of disciplines. The most relevant are anthropology, ethnography, history and linguistics, but in some cases

⁴ Richters 1991. Terry Eagleton forcefully argues along similar lines in 1996:93–135.

⁵ El-Affendi 1991, and Geertz 1994c.

philosophy, theology, art history (in so far as it concerns indigenous art and iconography), cognitive psychology, geography, botany, astronomy, etc. are also relevant. There is, in other words, need of a methodological pluralism in the study of indigenous religions which, by the way, should also be an ideal in the study of any living religion.

Ethnohermeneutics attempts to provide such a methodological pluralism in terms of a uniform approach.⁶ The term should not be understood as other “ethno” terms, such as ethnoart⁷ or ethnohistory which simply mean the study of indigenous art or archival studies of indigenous peoples. Rather it draws its inspiration from the ethnosciences.

The French africanist anthropologist, Marc Augé, recently wrote in his little book *The War of Dreams* an eminently quotable characterization of the ethnosciences:

The ‘ethno-sciences’ always set themselves two goals. As a prefix, ‘ethno-’ relativises the term which follows it and makes it depend upon ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture,’ which are assumed to have analogous practices to those that we call ‘sciences’: medicine, botany, zoology. . . . From this standpoint, ethno-science attempts to reconstitute what serves as science for others, their practices of looking after themselves and their bodies, their botanical knowledge, but also their forms of classification, of making connections, etc. Of course, once it becomes generalised, ethno-science alters its standpoint: it tries to put forward an appraisal of local, indigenous models, and possibly to compare them to others and, furthermore, to suggest an analysis of cognitive procedures in operation within a given number of systems. It then sometimes goes by the name of anthropology, thus one talks about medical or cognitive anthropology.⁸

The ethnosciences grew out of several different traditions. Ethnomethodology, which was founded by sociologist Harold Garfinkel in 1954, was mainly interested in discourse analysis.⁹ Ethnosemantics or ethnoscience, which combines linguistic and anthropological disciplines, is mainly interested in how social agents recognize, produce

⁶ See the following: Geertz 1990a, 1990b, 1992/1994a, 1994b, and 1999a.

⁷ See Haselberger 1961 and 1969, and Benzing 1978.

⁸ Augé 1999:118.

⁹ See Garfinkel 1967 and 1968; Turner 1974; O’Keefe 1979; Heritage 1984; Sharrock and Anderson 1986; Quasthoff 1986; Keesing 1987:371; and Flynn 1991.

and reproduce social behavior and social structures. The goal of ethno-science is to develop a cultural grammar based on formal, taxonomic and paradigmatic principles.¹⁰ This ambition draws inspiration from Chomsky's generative linguistics.

Anthropological psychologist Richard Shweder characterized some of the concerns of the ethnosciences during the 1970s as follows:

Folk knowledge,¹¹ everyday systems of classification,¹² mundane principles of inference,¹³ and ordinary language 'representational' schemes and their influence on man's ability to observe, remember, and predict¹⁴ have all come under investigation.¹⁵

Two other approaches arose during the 1970s, namely, ethnosemantics and ethnophilosophy. The former focused somewhat ideologically on the production of culture as interpretation especially in relation to the meeting of cultures,¹⁶ and the latter emphasized more the hermeneutics of perception in anthropology than the indigenous practice of hermeneutics.¹⁷ Common to both approaches was a firm conviction that anthropology itself was fashioning a new planetary culture,¹⁸ or the potential to develop new forms of society.¹⁹ Ethnosemantics has since developed into the study of sign systems and their functions from an ethnographic viewpoint.²⁰

Ethnoscience developed parallel to symbolic anthropology — especially the work of Clifford Geertz which was laying the foundation for

¹⁰ See Keesing 1987:369; Quinn and Holland 1987:14; Tyler 1986.

¹¹ See Agar 1973; Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven 1973; D'Andrade 1976; and Frake 1961.

¹² See Lévi-Strauss 1962, and Tyler 1969.

¹³ See Hutchins 1980.

¹⁴ See D'Andrade 1974; Lucy and Shweder 1979; and Shweder 1977a and 1977b.

¹⁵ Shweder 1984:33.

¹⁶ See MacCannell 1979:151.

¹⁷ See Dupré 1975:2–3.

¹⁸ Dupré 1975:11.

¹⁹ MacCannell 1979:151.

²⁰ See Herzfeld 1981, and Voigt 1986.

interpretive anthropology and the study of culturally constructed common sense²¹ — and cognitive anthropology, and it has produced many excellent studies on cultural knowledge, lexical folk-taxonomies, semantic structures, the production and reproduction of meaning, kinship systems, color terminology, ethnobotanical taxonomies, cognitive representations, and so on. In other words, the main interest is in indigenous cognitive domains and systems of knowledge, which can be deduced through interviews, observation, and other source materials.²² According to anthropologist Roy D'Andrade, this approach has developed methods to:

... work out a taxonomy, or scale terms in a domain, or find prototypic objects, or work out a cultural model, or show how reasoning or memory or other psychological processes are affected by cultural representations, or investigate the way in which cultural knowledge is distributed. ...²³

These are admittedly modest accomplishments, as D'Andrade points out, but they are nevertheless worthwhile points of departure for further study.

These developments must in my opinion be integrated with the perennial concerns of meaning and interpretation in the study of religion if we are to understand other cultures. Interpretation in this respect is the interpretation of indigenous hermeneutics (the indigenous act of constructing reality) in its entire social, historical, cognitive and linguistic context. Thus, in accordance with Johannes Fabian, the interpretation of meaning not only involves “matching expression and content, bounded provinces of meaning with distinct systems of symbols and then with distinct forms of behaviour” but also, and especially, to understand “the *creation* of meaning, or of a meaningful praxis, in and through events of speech and communication.”²⁴

²¹ See Clifford Geertz 1966, 1972, 1973b, 1974, and 1975.

²² Knight 1977:194, and Keesing 1987:376. See also Lutz 1987:291; Haviland 1977; Holy and Stuchlik 1981; Quinn and Holland 1987.

²³ D'Andrade 1995:252.

²⁴ Fabian 1985:147.

But ethnohermeneutic interpretation is also reflection on the hermeneutics of the scholar, in other words, it brings in the fact of academic construction and the role it plays in discovering, producing and reproducing knowledge. This creative activity, which Jonathan Z. Smith called “imagining religion,” is a “second order, reflective imagination” that is created “for the scholar’s analytical purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization.”²⁵

Thus, ethnohermeneutics attempts to locate the scholar and the people under study in each their own network of discourses, traditions, texts and meanings in the context of their social and intellectual circumstances. The result, I suggest, is a third perspective whereby the frames of reference of the scholar and the people under study are transcended.

I presented the term at the 1985 congress of the International Association for the History of Religions in Sydney without realizing that it had, in fact, appeared in the anthropological literature during the 1970s. The term appears as a section title in a collection of papers presented at the 1973 international congress of anthropological and ethnological sciences, but, as the editor of the volume wrote, papers were placed in this section (and other sections) without “any great regard for which label befits what.”²⁶ One of the papers in that section, however, uses the term in its title, namely Beryl L. Bellman’s paper on the Fala Kpelle in Liberia.²⁷ Even though he does not discuss the term itself, the subtitle of the paper indicates what he means: “Ethnohermeneutics: On the Interpretation of Intended Meaning Among the Kpelle of Liberia.” Bellman is interested in a methodology that attempts to interpret indigenous subjective meaning: “Because our concern is with the interpretative techniques particular to Kpelle speakers, these descriptions are referred to as a kind of ethnohermeneutics,” in practice, however,

²⁵ Smith 1982:xi.

²⁶ McCormack 1977:6.

²⁷ Bellman 1977. See also Bellman 1975, and Bellman and Jules-Rosette 1977.

he analyzes implicit indigenous taxonomies.²⁸ The other papers in the section seem to use the term similarly as “indigenous hermeneutics” or “native intellectual traditions,” in the sense of ethnoart or ethnohistory, or as linguistic analyses performed by native scholars.

Semiotician Mihály Hoppál used the term at a conference in Finland in 1987 to mean an ethnosemiotical hermeneutics which attempts to understand “the meaning embedded in the tradition of a given culture,” and he pointed out that it is similar to the anthropological interpretation of “alien cultures.”²⁹ My colleague Jordan Paper at York University in Ontario is currently developing his own interpretations of its meaning and use.³⁰

The interesting thing about the term is that it often evokes in people who hear or read the term for the first time an immediate intuitive understanding of what it means. I understand the term in four different ways with each their own function or purpose, namely: 1) as a taxonomic tool; 2) as a hermeneutic lense on indigenous hermeneutics; 3) as a tool in hermeneutical confrontation; and 4) as a dialogical tool. Ethnohermeneutics does not solve everything, but it’s quite useful anyway.

Ethnohermeneutics as a taxonomic tool

This type of ethnoscience consists of detailed analyses of implicit cultural structures. Some of the best studies have been done by linguists such as the lexical analysis of semantic domains in the Hopi language by Charles and Florence Voegelin of 1957 and the semantic analyses of space and time in Hopi by linguist Ekkehart Malotki in 1979 and 1983. Anthropologist Richard Bradfield has done pioneer work on Hopi cosmognosis,³¹ which has particularly inspired my own

²⁸ Bellman 1977:272. The paper has the additional important point that the relation between rule and meaning is situationally determined.

²⁹ Hoppál 1988:28.

³⁰ Paper 1997:8, 11–12; Pitawanakwat and Paper 1996. Jordan Paper is currently working on an application of the ethnohermeneutic approach to an analysis of mysticism.

³¹ Bradfield 1973, 2:254.

work in that area.³² In order to grasp Hopi cosmological orientation, one must analyze a wide variety of sources such as ritual choreography, ritual songs, prayers and speeches, as well as the structure of altars and other iconographical items. This variegated material indicates that Hopi cosmological orientation is based on six directions, namely the four quarters, zenith and nadir. Since the four quarters are based on the position of the sun on the eastern and western horizons during the solstices, this system, which I call the astrosphere system, consists of *kwiniwiq*, 'northwest,' called north in the literature; *teevenge*, 'southwest,' called west in the literature; *taatöq*, 'southeast,' called south in the literature; *hoopoq*, 'northeast,' called east in the literature; *oomiq*, 'zenith,' and *atkyamiq*, 'nadir.' Each major altar includes a smaller altar called *naanan'i'vovongya*, 'all directions altar,' which is a perfect example of indigenous visualization of the astrosphere. As Figure 1 indicates, this altar with its objects and terminology iconographically reproduce Hopi cosmological orientation.

The astrosphere also seems to be the backdrop of implicit classificatory schemes. In following up on Lévi-Strauss' correspondence chart on Hopi classification (which was inspired by the chart on Zuni classification published by Durkheim and Mauss before him),³³ Bradfield deducted what he called "a kind of 'logical' classification of the natural world."³⁴ This was accomplished by a meticulous analysis of Hopi ritual songs. The songs of the Powamuy Ceremonial were particularly relevant because the verses repeat six variations of the same words except changes of color and objects. For example:

First verse:

You, over yonder to the northwest!
 Yellow clouds, come out and rise.
 From your dwellings come from over yonder.
 Yellow lightning, come out and rise.
 From your dwelling come from over yonder.

³² Geertz 1984, 1987, and 1996a.

³³ Lévi-Strauss 1962:55–56; Durkheim and Mauss 1903:34ff.

³⁴ Bradfield 1973, 2:91.

Yellow raindrops, sprinkle on us
and refresh the crops.

Second verse:

You, over yonder to the southwest!
Blue clouds, come out and rise.
From your dwellings come from over yonder.
Blue lightning, come out and rise.
From your dwelling come from over yonder.
Blue raindrops, sprinkle on us
and refresh the crops.
[And so on.]³⁵

The resultant chart is reproduced in Figure 2 with my corrected orthography.³⁶ Bradfield's analysis is somewhat problematical because the ethnographic literature is inconsistent, probably due to rival clan traditions and failing memory. Bradfield was himself in doubt whether the list actually constitutes a classification of the natural world, since it comprises only a small portion of the total number of species known to and named by the Hopis. Furthermore, he had no way of proving that the scheme had any influence on Hopi thought.³⁷ But these matters need not detain us here.

Ethnohermeneutics as a hermeneutic lense on indigenous hermeneutics

Taxonomic classification schemes are quite useful in the analysis of indigenous worldviews. But there are further levels of analysis to explore. And the key to moving beyond the taxonomic to the more deeper-lying levels is by paying attention to indigenous reflection. The fact is that indigenous thinkers — just like us — are deeply involved in hermeneutical reflection on their own religious and cultural values. This level of analysis draws inspiration from the sociology of knowledge which is interested in how reality is constructed in the common

³⁵ Voth 1901:127.

³⁶ See Geertz 1996a.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Direction	Kwiniwiq (northwest)	Teevenge (southwest)	Taatōq (southeast)	Hoopōq (northeast)	Oomiq (above)	Atkyamiq (below)
Colour	sikyangu (yellow)	sakwa (blue)	paalangpu (red)	qōōisa (white)	qōmvi (black)	maasi/nana'longō (gray/all colours)
Mineral	nayawuna (yellowish stone)	tsormuma (turquoise)	wawuna (pink stone)	saatsina (white stone or shell)	aywanga (black stone)	tsimotsima (grayish stone)
Bird	taawamana (oriole)	tsoro (mountain bluebird)	kyaaaro (parrot or macaw)	poosiwu (magpie)	pawawkyaya (swift or cliff swallow)	tuposkwa (canyon wren)
Flower	heesi (mariposa lily)	tsorosi (larkspur)	mansi (Indian paint brush)	polisi (evening primrose)	aqawsi (sunflower)	sokosi ("all kinds of blooms")
Cultivated plant	hum'i'uyi (corn)	mori'uyi (bean)	patanguyi (squash)	piisinuyi (cotton)	kawayuyi (watermelon)	melonuyi (melon)
Corn	takuri (yellow)	sakwapu (blue)	palaqa'ō (red)	qōtsaqa'ō (white)	kokoma (black)	tawaktsi (sweet corn)
Prey	toho (mountain lion)	hoonawu (black bear)	kwewu (gray wolf)	tokotsi (wild cat)	kwaahu (golden eagle)	honani (badger)
Game	sowi'ngwa (deer)	pangwu (mountain sheep)	tsōōviw (antelope)	tsayrisa (elk)	sowi (jack rabbit)	taavo (cottontail)
Bird of prey	hongwiikya (Cooper's hawk)	kiisa (prairie falcon)	natuyawu (sharp- shinned hawk)	sowito'aya (unidentified)	kwaahu (golden eagle)	masikwayo (Swainson's hawk)
Tree or shrub	kwingvi (mountain oak)	qahavi (willow)	hunvi (cliff rose)	hohu (juniper)	sivaapi (rabbit brush)	tusivapi (?) (a smaller species of rabbit brush)

Figure 2. Hopi directional classification scheme.

sense world of daily life.³⁸ All human beings are interpreters. They draw on social constructions that make sense of their own situation and that allow them to recognize the intentions and motivations of others in society. This allows them to attain intersubjective understanding and the possibility of coordinating communal activity. But in order to bring analysis in contact with this hermeneutical activity, one must go beyond taxonomical analyses. Along the lines drawn by Anne Salmond in her study of scientific metaphors,³⁹ *this phase of hermeneutical analysis places the analyst and the subject on equal terms with each other* (see Figure 3).

A good example of this kind of analysis is found in the work of the above-mentioned linguists Voegelin and Voegelin. They designed a conversation analysis of open-ended interviews which revealed the implicit and explicit judgments made by Hopi speakers on a range of moral and ethical issues. They then isolated eight central statements that in their opinion constitute Hopi didactic ethics, in other words, judgments on good and bad behavior.⁴⁰

This particular area was an important part of my research among the Hopis. My goal was to record Hopi hermeneutical reflections in their own language. The resultant material is interesting and unique in Hopi research. The material indicates that the Hopi ritual person is the ideal person. He or she embodies all of the qualities of what it means to be Hopi. The word *hopi* means 'well behaved, well mannered,' and it indicates that the person is humble, hospitable, good humored, helpful, peaceful, diligent, and so on. People say about those who are well behaved that, "They have followed the right path" (*puma put pöhutwat angya*). My analysis of various statements and sources has led me to postulate that this path refers to a Hopi causal chain:

The Hopi conceive of human life as an integral part of a chain reaction. It is a logical sequence of givens: proper attitude and the careful completing of ceremonials bring the clouds, which drop their moisture and nourish their

³⁸ Berger and Luckmann 1969; Schütz 1960.

³⁹ Salmond 1982.

⁴⁰ Voegelin and Voegelin 1957 and 1960.

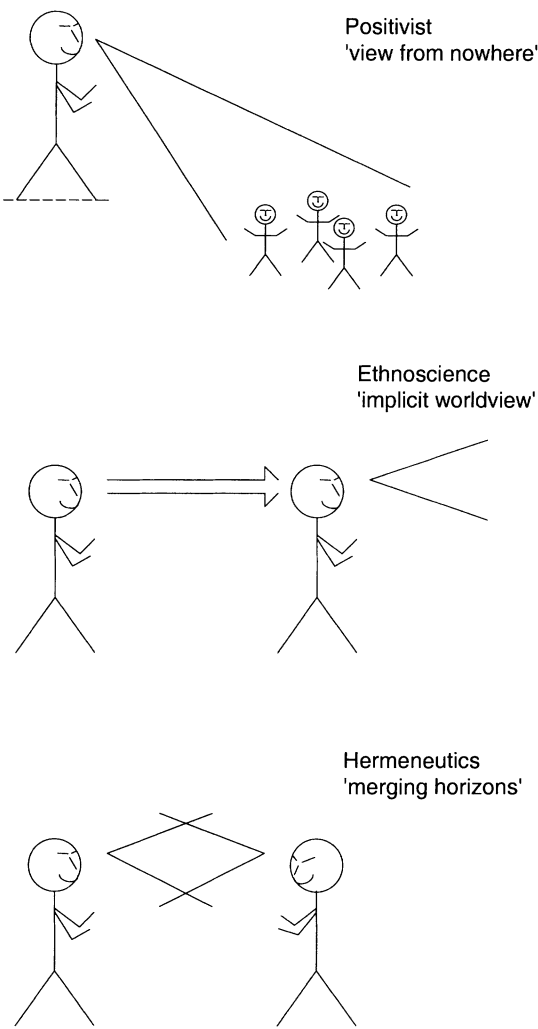


Figure 3. Cross-cultural understanding.

children (the corn and vegetation). The crops are harvested and human life is regenerated, the stages of life continue and the Hopi ideal is reached: to become old and die in one's sleep.⁴¹

⁴¹ Geertz 1986:48.

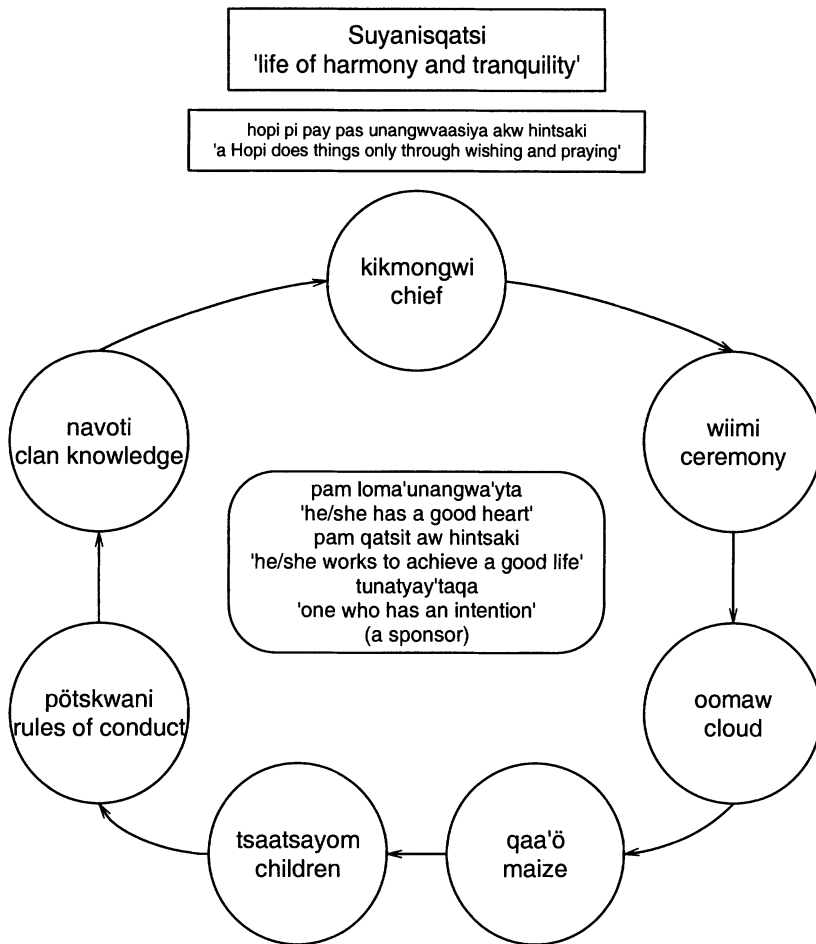


Figure 4. Causal chain of the good life.

The causal chain is dependent on the morals of each individual — especially the chiefs — and on the proper completion of the ceremonies. In order to complete the ceremonies properly, one must be initiated into clan knowledge and tradition. Ritual persons are spoken of as *pam qatsit aw hintsaki*, 'he/she works for life,' in other words, human life is equated with ritual life. The causal chain is illustrated in Figure 4.

I discovered during my stays on the Reservation that Hopis are very conscious about their religion, and they spend a lot of time discussing and debating religious detail and interpretation in the kivas and councils. By accident it came to my attention in 1979 that there was heated debate during one of the ceremonies I was witnessing. The ceremony itself seemed to be working quite harmoniously on the surface. It took me several years of trailing hints dropped by Hopi friends and consultants, but what finally came out in the process of several interviews were the contours of the darker side of Hopi religion.

The situation occurred during the little known Sa'lakwmanawyat Ceremonial in March. This ceremonial is a repetition of the above-mentioned major spring ceremonial, the Powamuya, which is held in February. The Powamuya lasts 16 days and is meant to invoke the powers of heat and germination, to secure fertility and the health of children, and to initiate children aged 8–10 in the masked brotherhoods (the Powamuy and Katsina Societies). Whereas the Powamuya is dramatized by masked dancers, the Sa'lakwmanawyat is dramatized by sacred puppets together with masked dancers. My first book was an analysis of the Sa'lakwmanawyat Ceremonial.⁴²

The dolls represent two young females who grind maize to the beat of the Katsina fertility songs. Their movement is controlled through a simple system of strings and weights. As Figure 5 indicates, the central scene during the ceremonial is a cornucopia of sensory impressions. Furthermore, the smells and sounds add to an interplay of color, light and shadow, at times cacophonous. The dramatization is the result of an impressive orchestration of cooperative efforts between clans and societies as well as the coordination of a very large number of dance troupes and the cooking and distribution of large amounts of food and gifts.

The dolls are treated as animate creatures.⁴³ They are dangerous in ritual contexts, but were otherwise kept in the clan house of the Piikyas

⁴² Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987.

⁴³ I have lost track of where the Sa'lakwmanawyat and Koyemsihoya dolls are. During a tragic fire in the early 1990's, the clan house burned to the ground, and it

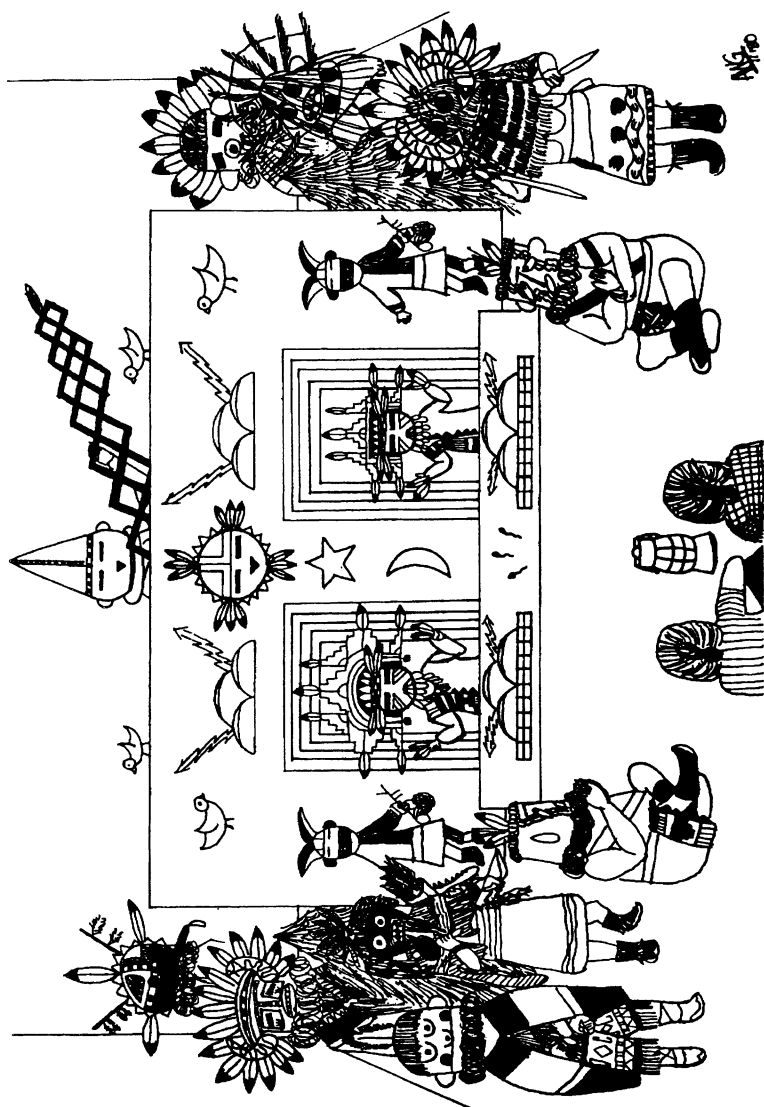


Figure 5. Sa' lakwamanawyat ceremonial.

Hopi Sacred Puppets: Scale of Animacy

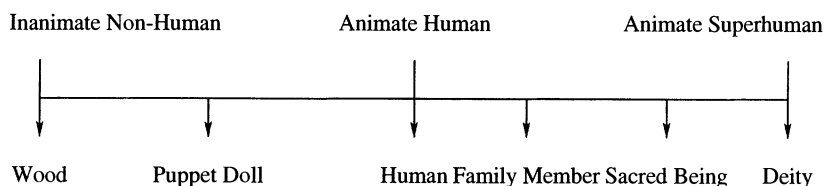


Figure 6. Scale of animacy.

Clan as if they were ordinary family members. They were literally considered to be the older sisters of the children in the family. Even though they were kept hidden in a back room, they were often included in household conversations, they were always invited to the dinner table, and they usually were blamed for all the strange things that the family experienced, whether strange sounds and smells, sticking doors or miraculous healing and protection. Other members of the village came to the house to offer gifts and to pray for fertility and protection. And those children of the family who were born ‘because of the dolls’ often demonstrated the miraculous qualities of the dolls. Thus, the dolls cross the barriers between humans and non-humans, animate and inanimate, and as Figures 6 and 7 indicate they exemplify all the variations of agency that are logically possible. Obviously, a fuller examination of the semiotic and cognitive dimensions of what I would call the Hopi iconicity of agency will be taken up in another publication.⁴⁴

was thought that the dolls went with it. On the other hand, there are rumors that the dolls were not in the house at the time.

⁴⁴ I presented an outline of such an examination in a paper entitled “What Makes Masks Talk and Puppets Move? On Efficacy and the Iconicity of Agency” presented to the 1997 conference on “Magic: Between Culture and Cognition” hosted by the Department of the Study of Religion, University of Aarhus, Denmark. See Proshan 1983 for an enlightening approach to the semiotic study of puppets, masks and performing objects, and Boyer 1994 for his theory on cognitive domains.

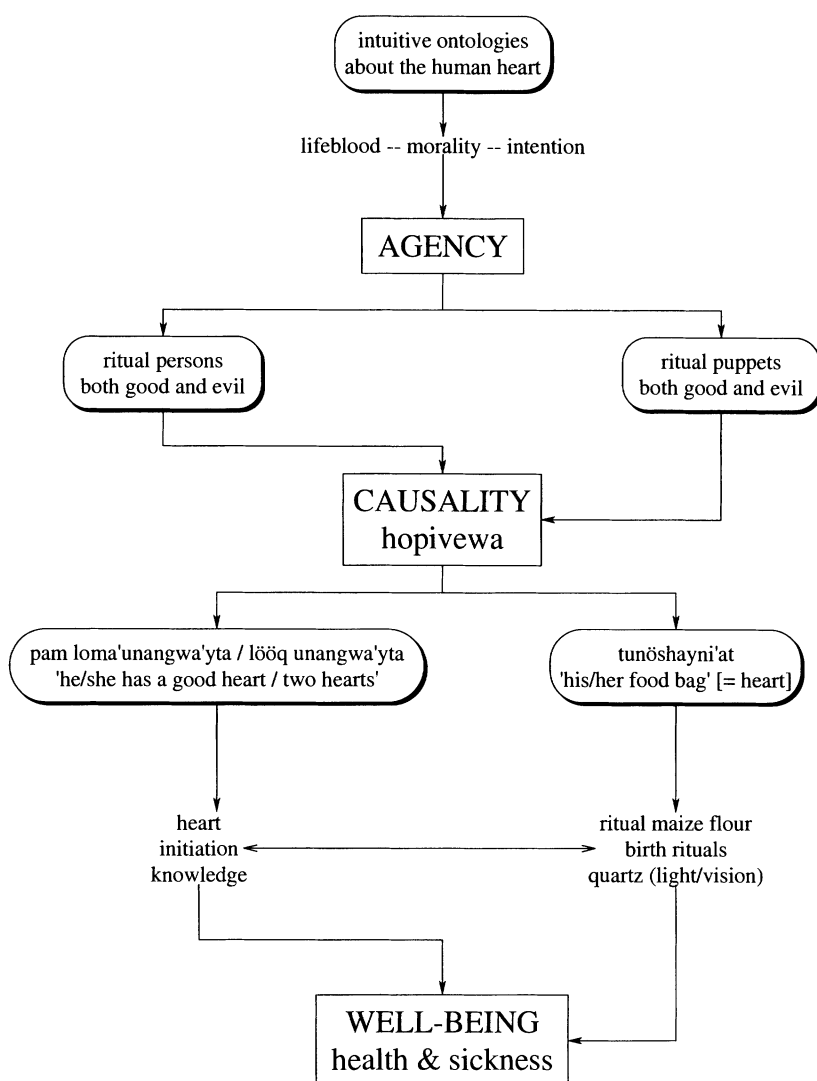


Figure 7. Iconicity and agency in Hopi ritual puppetry.

During the Sa'lakwmanawyat Ceremonial one of the dolls fell out of beat because her arm became stuck. This seemingly innocent accident gave rise to serious controversy in the whole village during the rest of the ceremonial event. One of the reasons for the recrimination and

anger was due to the tension of clan politics. The Piikyas Clan is the only clan that does not follow the universal tabu against taking salt during ritual events. Even though many clans consider disregard of the tabu to be blasphemous, Hopi clans are sufficiently autonomous to follow their own particular rituals and traditions. Clan autonomy, on the other hand, is clearly one of the major sources of conflict and tension in Hopi society. Thus, every time something goes wrong in the Piikyas Clan, whether in ritual circumstances or just in general, it is interpreted by the other clans to be another example of their unusual tradition.⁴⁵

The controversy in 1979 reminded everyone of a similar circumstance during another ceremonial several years earlier. This time it was the Koyemsihoya Ceremonial during which the third Piikyas puppet is used.⁴⁶ The Koyemsihoya is literally the 'little Mudhead,' a puppet version of the Mudhead clowns. As Figure 8 indicates, the Koyemsihoya performs together with a masked Kooyemsi ritual clown. The puppet dances on the little box by strings attached to the clown's hands thus perfectly matching the movement of the clown. The Koyemsihoya is a little trickster who pulls all kinds of stunts back home, but who also ensures health and protection, especially of the young Hopi men enrolled in military service. At some point, a man who is a grandchild of the now deceased Piikyas matriarch hosted the Koyemsihoya Ceremonial. According to an interview with the host's maternal uncle, the puppet had been checked and re-checked, and preparations had proceeded in the correct ritual order. During the first performance, however, which is always held in the home kiva, the puppet did not move its arms correctly. Everyone saw it and was troubled by it. After the first performance was over, the troupe retired to the clan house and examined the puppet. They discovered that a mouse had gnawed one of the internal strings apart. The string was repaired, but that was not considered to be the real cause of the mishap. The other clans found the cause in

⁴⁵ Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987:113–145.

⁴⁶ Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987:171–175, and Geertz 1990a:315–321.

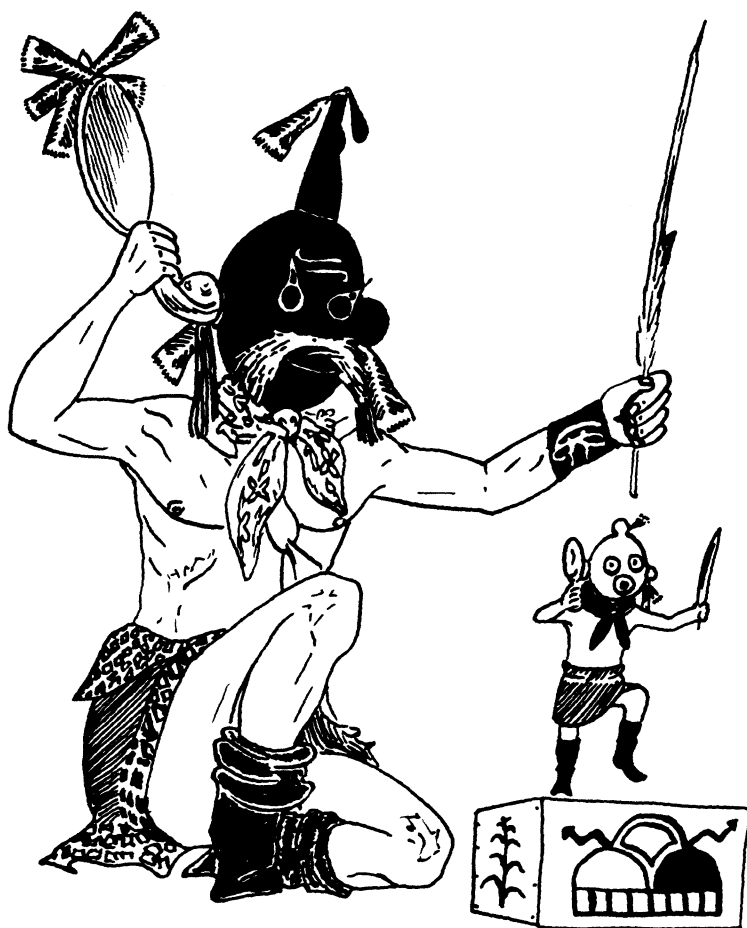


Figure 8. Koyemsihoya ceremonial.

the Piikyas disregard of the salt tabu. But the Piikyas members found cause in the host's motives and attitude.

A host is called *tunatyaytaqa*, 'one who has an intention.' Proper intention is integral to the above-mentioned causal chain (Figure 4). If a host, or anyone for that matter, breaks a link anywhere in the chain, it affects the rest of the chain. Thus, a host who is unknowledgeable or immoral or evil fails to entice the gods and spirits to participate in the ceremonial, and the rain clouds, therefore, stay away from the

area and do not nourish the crops. Without crops, irreparable damage is done to the whole fabric of life, and the people starve, become ill and die. The host in this case was accused by the troupe of a number of moral sins such as vanity, ambition and inattention. The host confessed that they were right. He promised to change his selfish ways and to ask the Koyemsihoya for forgiveness. After the public confession was over and intense prayers were offered to Koyemsihoya, the ceremonial was effectuated without further mishap.

His sins were basically against proper ritual procedure and the social ethic. The latter because he did not live up to the social ideal of person, and the former because he did not have a pure heart and mind. From this moral juncture and on to evil is just a short step. I was told by one of my consultants after a long oratory on the importance of pure thoughts and concentration on the causal chain and how people today perform ceremonials for selfish gain or to impress others, he said, "Really, those who wish to do evil with or to the katsinas can actually do it." He also referred to the fact that some katsina dancers are not beneath practicing love magic on recalcitrant girls.⁴⁷

There are only a few studies on Hopi witchcraft and sorcery.⁴⁸ The best are the short 1943 article by ethnographer Mischa Titiev, a chapter in linguist Ekkehart Malotki's book on Hopi ruin legends, and his book on witchcraft, shamanism and magic.⁴⁹ I have also collected interview material, some of which I have published.⁵⁰ This material gives an intimidating impression of powerlessness and abject fear of occult attack by witches or sorcerers. Those who deliberately commit evil can come from one's own matrilineage or one's closest family members, with the result that suspicion, gossip and spite often pollute family and personal relations. A significant amount of time is spent

⁴⁷ Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987:236: Pay pas antsa piw pumuy katsinmuy akw nunukpannik pay piw sonqe patsaki (p. 307).

⁴⁸ This paragraph is reproduced in a recent paper, where the psychological implications are more extensively discussed (Geertz 2002).

⁴⁹ Titiev 1943, Malotki 1993:149–187, and Malotki and Gary 2001.

⁵⁰ Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987, and Geertz 1992/1994a.

gossiping about whether this or that person is a witch or sorcerer. My analysis of the evidence revealed a causal chain of the evil life which mirrors the above-mentioned causal chain of the good life (Figure 9). Whereas the latter is meant to ensure *suyanisqatsi*, 'a harmonious and tranquil life,' the former ensures *koyaanisqatsi*, 'a corrupt life, a life out of balance.' These two lives reveal an opposition between the good religious life and the evil magic one. Magic and sorcery is practiced by people who need to increase their own life expectancy — which is shortened because of their pact with evil — through the occult murder of close relatives. They are initiated into the sorcerers' society just like the good people are initiated into the religious societies, and like them they are built up along the same hierarchical lines and the same kinds of rituals. Their activities are motivated by evil intentions, in other words, in opposition to the host of a religious ceremonial, the sorcerer is a *nukustunatyay'taqa*, 'one who has an evil intention.'

By carefully examining individual postures of shame and guilt as well as the ultimate expression of collective shame and guilt in the doomsday expectations of the *Nuutungk Talöngvaqa*, 'the Last Day,' the contours of a Hopi indigenous hermeneutic presents itself, as in Figure 10. According to the Hopis, religious tradition develops through an interaction between the gods, spirits and ancestors, on the one hand, and the clan groups on the other. Both of these sources of tradition are clearly interrelated with the interpretive individual, and the individual influences them in return. But the main road of influence on the interpretive framework of the individual, as well as on his or her identity, personality and continual socialization, is religious tradition expressed in ethics, rituals and eschatology.⁵¹

An interesting example of this socially imposed hermeneutic⁵² was related to me by one of my consultants. He was participating in a katsina dance when suddenly his mask began choking him. Keeping his problem hidden from the other participants, he succumbed to the mask and admitted his guilt to it. He then pleaded with the mask to

⁵¹ Geertz 1990a:329.

⁵² See Geertz 1992:18ff. (1994a:63ff.).

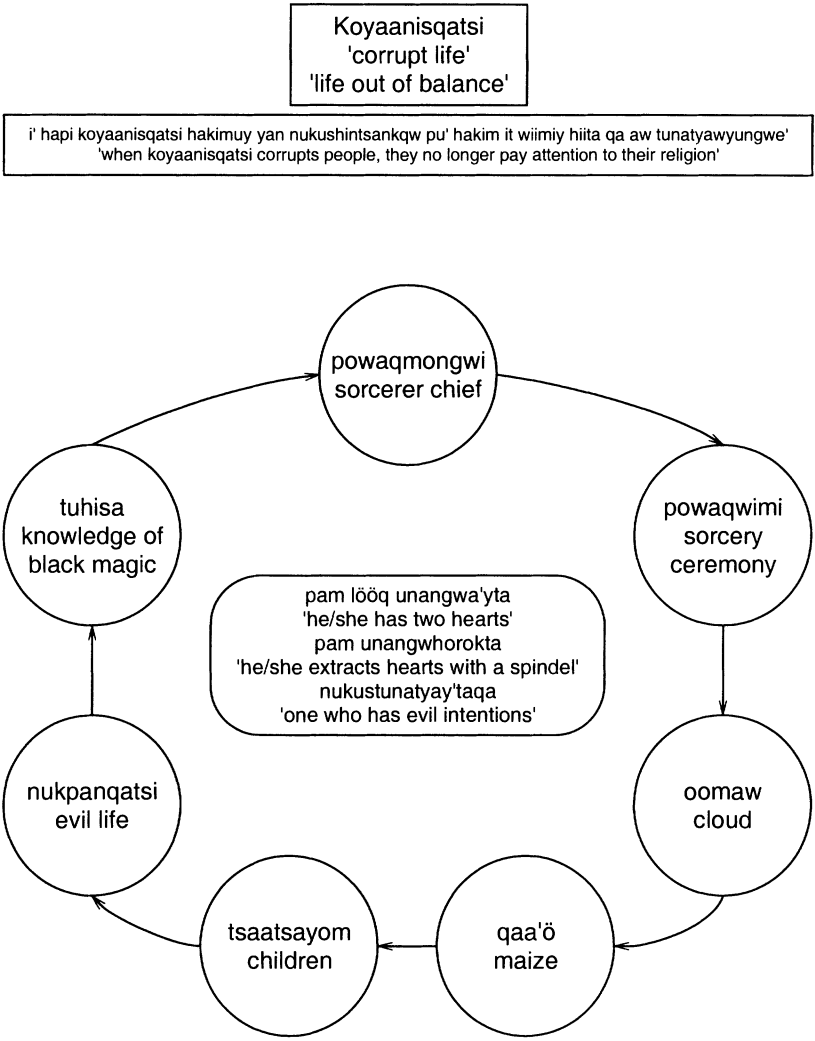


Figure 9. Causal chain of the bad life.

forgive him. After that he could breathe easily, see clearly, dance all day without getting tired and sing loudly without losing his voice. As he said, “My friend had punished me for neglecting him,” i.e. he had not followed the proper ritual procedure, and he had failed the causal chain of the good life.

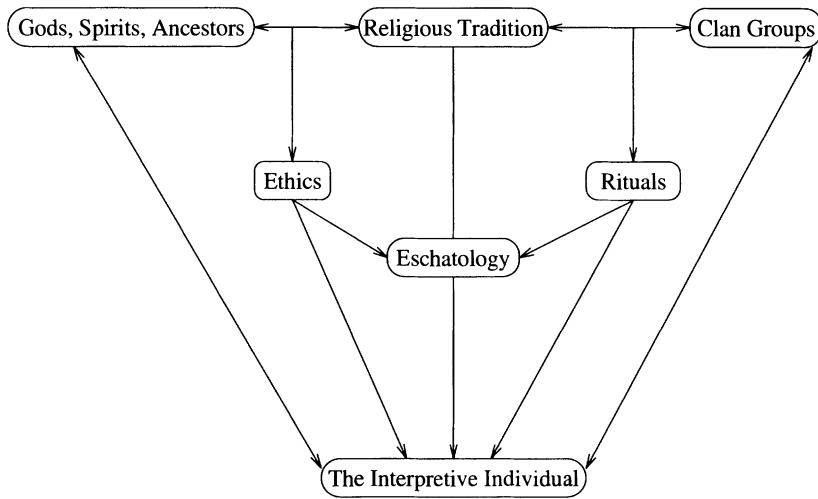


Figure 10. Hopi hermeneutics.

This situation illustrates the workings of George Herbert Mead's 'generalized other.' The generalized other is the voice of internal conversation in the individual. It assumes the organized social attitudes of the given group to which the individual belongs, and in this manner the community exercises control over the conduct of its members. As Mead said:

And only through the taking by individuals of the attitude or attitudes of the generalized other toward themselves is the existence of a universe of discourse, as that system of common or social meanings which thinking presupposes as its context, rendered possible.⁵³

When the self is fully developed, in other words, when it is fully socialized, the individual becomes a "reflection of the general systematic pattern of social or group behavior in which it and the others are all involved."⁵⁴ Thus the above example indicates the role that human communication plays in constructing the self and socializing the individual.

⁵³ Mead 1934:156.

⁵⁴ Mead 1934:158.

Ethnohermeneutics as a tool in hermeneutical confrontation

Religious people interpret their own situation and come up with explanations on a need-to-know basis. They draw on cultural repertoires as interpretive frameworks to produce hermeneutical solutions. They do not necessarily have, or need to have, the 'complete picture,' but are able to construct solutions from the bits and pieces of their particular interpretive framework. This hermeneutical mechanism, or talent, if you will, became evident in my study of Hopi prophecies.⁵⁵ Their surprising flexibility in the details of re-telling their sacred traditions forced me to move beyond the substantial claims being made, and in the process, bring my interpretive efforts in confrontation with indigenous discourse. At this point, the ethnohermeneutical approach takes on what in ethnoscience is called 'ethnomethodological indifference.' This so-called indifference forces the researcher to look beyond the versions of social and cultural structures promoted by both Hopis and scholars alike. Instead, the focus of interest is to discover how people produce, reproduce and co-create the social structures that inform their orientation in the world. This point of view is called 'indifference,' but it is actually a question of hermeneutical activities that diverge, confront one another or sometimes clash.

Through the simple method of critically comparing indigenous statements and behavior with archive materials, reports, fieldwork, ethnographic data, political literature, archaeological data, etc. in a historical perspective, the end result becomes something more than both the student and the subject. Furthermore, when the result is confronted with theories advanced in philosophy and the social sciences, new data arises in the sense of new perspectives on the data at hand or the anticipation of data overseen or the need to find new data. This interplay of theory and data forces inherited knowledge and *a priori* assumptions into a critical light, and shows clearly that our work is more than curiosity about exotic languages and cultures. Analytical work is obligated to discovering the laws and features of the human universe. We

⁵⁵ Geertz 1992/1994a.

are deeply involved in such an endeavor whether we know it or not. Our study of religions and cultures is informed by assumptions about religion, culture and humanity, which is why it is imperative that we make such assumptions explicit before we deal with a particular text or event.⁵⁶

It becomes clear that many of our received assumptions about a whole series of things, not the least being our understanding of what a 'text' is, need re-evaluation. In the living social contexts of religious humans, the scholar is confronted with how meaning is produced in the context of the moment as a result of rhetorical, ritual and other cultural tools. From this perspective, the scholar is induced to pay closer attention to communication processes than to truth claims.

In this case, one discovers how Hopi prophets change their apparent revelations, traditionalists their traditions and, yet, believers keep on believing. Furthermore, a stream of movements and groups have used Hopis and their prophecies as symbols in their own ideological, political or religious agendas. Those Hopis who chose to cooperate with these outsiders took on new roles and new meanings which have been fundamental to the development of Hopi prophecy.⁵⁷ Prophecies could be seen as indigenous instruments to incorporate, evaluate, interpret and judge contemporary affairs in the light of conceived traditional religious values. Thus prophecy becomes a rhetorical instrument that is authoritative, conditional, open-ended, reflective, inflective and emotive.

In order to negotiate this complexity, it is important to re-evaluate received ideas about prophecy, i.e. that prophets are spiritual authorities in direct communication with divinity, that tradition is stable and unchanging, and that congregations are passive receptacles of revelation through their prophets. Scratching the surface is enough to show that prophets are ideological idealists, often gifted orators and strategists, and sometimes savvy politicians. Tradition is a complex interplay

⁵⁶ See Geertz 1997b, 1999b, and 2000.

⁵⁷ See Geertz 1992/1994a, 1995 and 1997a.

of continuity, change and invention. The congregation is far from being passive receptacles. They are co-creators of the prophetic message, highly active in the production of meaning and reflection, and they often function as the prophet's critically agnostic partner. One must apply a methodological pluralism in order to understand and explain the social strategies of prophet and congregation in a dynamic matrix of continuity, change and invention. No explanation, however, can be given without the development of a theory of religion that is nourished by sociological, psychological and textual theories. An explanation must, in other words, pay close attention to cognition, motivation, situation and the production of meaning. The ethnohermeneutical approach, therefore, combines indigenous hermeneutics with social scientific and textual hermeneutics as indicated in Figure 11. But in order to complete the analysis, the scholar must reflect on his or her own situation, text and audience. The results of our scholarship do not arise in a vacuum. Our observations are theory-laden. They are informed by social, psychological, historical and theoretical conditions. Our publications express structural, literary and communicative styles, and the readers of those publications (professional or otherwise) have their own social, psychological, historical and theoretical expectations. Before the convergence of horizons can occur, we must be aware of our own horizons of understanding.

Ethnohermeneutics as a dialogical tool

The relationship between Native Americans and those who chose to study them has never been easy. Already at the end of the last century, the Hopi Indians were angry with Frank Hamilton Cushing, Jesse Walter Fewkes, H.R. Voth and Elsie Clews Parsons. But they had the power of the empire behind them and did little or nothing to relieve tensions between scholarship and the Hopis' right to privacy and their wish to keep religious ideas and behavior secret, on the contrary! Today, fieldwork scholarship as it has been practiced in the past is a closed chapter. Native peoples are tired of being bothered by outsiders, and they have developed sophisticated ways of dealing with them. They are also keenly aware of how their cultural values and ethnicity have made an

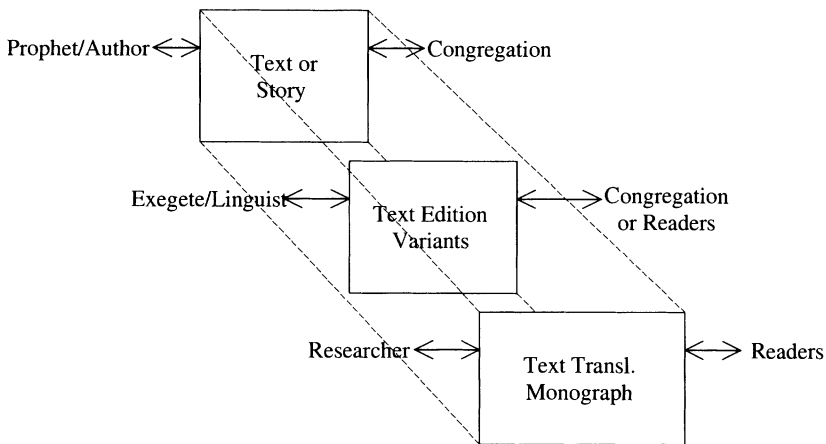


Figure 11. Ethnohermeneutics as a textual tool.

impact on the American public. Many Native Americans have university degrees and have understandably dedicated their achievements to the good of their own people. Native Americans that have become involved in research projects with outsiders now function as co-authors, but a growing number of tribes, especially the Pueblos, are currently demanding the sole right to cultural representation and aggressively pursue those non-Indians who write about them. The living laboratories of American anthropology have now become battlefields populated by angry Native American scholars, writers, artists and politicians. The status of indigenous peoples has increased during the 1990s by such events as the 'Columbian Quincentenary' and the United Nations declaration of 1993 as the 'Year of Indigenous Peoples.'

Unfortunately, good research has come to a standstill in some areas (fortunately, not as widespread as one could fear), and publishers, ever sensitive to popular opinion and sales figures, have stopped publishing some books due to pressure from tribal governments, even though no legal precedent is involved. This happened to a colleague of mine whose book was stopped by the Hopi Tribe even though it was contracted by the publisher. The highly restrictive policies of the Hopi Tribe have effectively stopped Ph.D. research in Hopi culture, which

must be approved by the Tribe before students can pursue projects on the Reservation.

Because of this situation, Louis Hieb, who was at the Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico at the time, the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office and I co-hosted a conference in Phoenix, Arizona in 1995 entitled "Dialogue with the Hopis: Cultural Copyright and Research Ethics."⁵⁸ Hieb and I hoped that the conference would encourage a dialogue that would ensure cultural research in terms that the Hopis would find acceptable. I had hoped that we could establish frameworks for future field projects, pay rates for consultants, the conditions of copyrighted information and so on, or at least reach declaration of intent. But the conference became in effect anthro-bashing. At one point, the Director of the Cultural Preservation Office presented a protocol on cultural research entitled "Protocol for Research, Publication and Recordings: Motion, Visual, Sound, Multimedia and Other Mechanical Devices" which in effect drastically restricts cultural research. Louis Hieb and I presented a document calling for the establishment of a "Commission of Scientific Research on Hopi Culture" (drawing inspiration from the Commission of Scientific Research in Greenland) which would allow a forum for discussion and recommendation on specific scientific projects on the Reservation and serve as a safety valve during crisis situations. Cultural research is a critical project and is based on the need-to-know and to proliferate that knowledge. On the other hand, Hopi culture is based on knowledge gained through secrecy and initiation. Furthermore, the Hopis have a legitimate interest in preserving their privacy and protecting themselves from exploitation.⁵⁹ Clearly these two cultural approaches are different, and therefore a commission comprised of Hopi officials and one or two scholars could serve to alleviate this basic disagreement through compromise and monitoring. I also circulated the 1988 *Magna Charta* declaration of European universities and the preamble to the 1949 charter of the UNESCO organization International Council for Philoso-

⁵⁸ See Geertz 1996b:406–410.

⁵⁹ See Greer 1995 and Brown 1998 for a summary of the issues.

phy and Humanistic Studies all of which promote cultural study as being essential to the well-being and freedom of individuals in non-totalitarian, democratic societies. But these documents made no impression.

Contemporary cultural research is hampered by extremely difficult conditions, but I am convinced that we can neither ignore nor succumb to this confrontation. Otherwise, we can just as well find other jobs. My basic stance is that it is fatal for research if we refrain from doing it because religious authority forbids it. We must of course reach agreements with the people under study in order to ensure privacy and reduce the risks they face, but analyses and results must be independent. Ethnohermeneutics can also function here as an instrument of dialogue. But it cannot work only one way. As Figure 12 indicates, the combination of methods and approaches which I have discussed so far present a third perspective that transcends both scholar and human subject. The perspective, furthermore, rests on a critical, agnostic platform. Whether or not indigenous consultants are interested in participating in cultural research projects (many do for a variety of reasons), the third perspective, which can be attained by both scholar and subject (if they wish), cannot be attained without the cooperation of the culturally competent indigenous consultant. Figure 12 is meant to show that the relationship between scholar and consultant is equal at the most fundamental level, but the results of the project itself transcend them both for methodological and historical reasons. It is a project committed to the study of humanity in its global dimensions.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to illustrate the history and complexities of the ethnohermeneutical approach. I feel that this approach has affinities to attitudes and methodologies of a large number of colleagues in the study of religion the world over, especially scholars of living religions. This approach attempts to deal with the extremely difficult but highly relevant criticisms raised against the Enlightenment project without throwing out the baby with the bathwater — a radi-

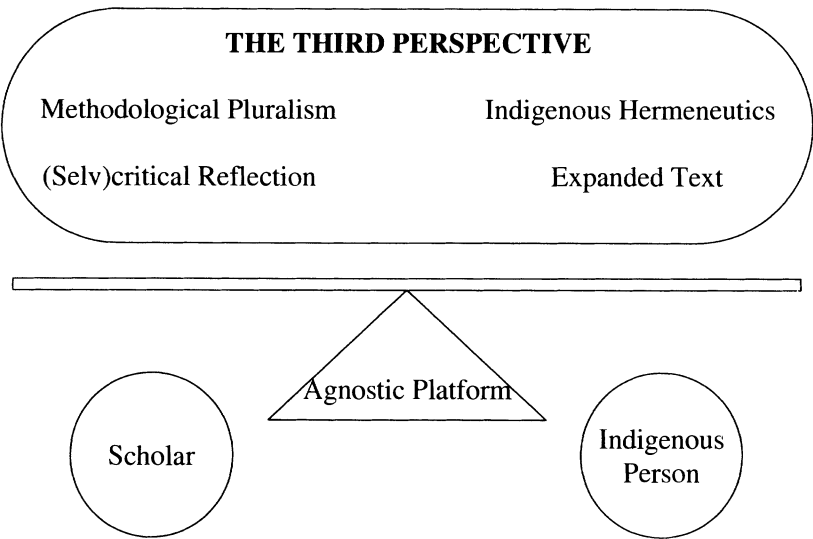


Figure 12. Ethnohermeneutics as the third perspective.

calized Enlightenment project that accepts the fuzzy nature of human religiosity and utilizes as many tools as possible to communicate with and about religious humans.

Notes on the illustrations

- Figure 1. Drawing of the *naanan'i'vovongya*, 'all directions altar' by Poul Nørbo, Århus. Originally published in Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987:20.
- Figure 2. Hopi directional classification scheme (the astrosphere). It is based on Bradfield 1972, 2:92–93 with corrected orthography. Originally published in Geertz 1996a:55.
- Figure 3. Drawing of cross-cultural understanding under inspiration of Anne Salmond's analysis of the scientific metaphors (Salmond 1982:75).
- Figure 4. The causal chain of the good life, drawn by Armin W. Geertz.
- Figure 5. Drawing of the central scene in the Sa'lakwmanawyat Cere-monial, by Armin W. Geertz. Originally published in Geertz 1982:176.

- Figure 6. Chart depicting the scale of animacy for Hopi sacred puppets, drawn by Armin W. Geertz.
- Figure 7. Chart depicting iconicity and agency in Hopi ritual puppetry, drawn by Armin W. Geertz.
- Figure 8. Drawing of the Koyemsihoya, by Poul Nørbo, Århus. Originally published in Geertz and Lomatuway'ma 1987:149.
- Figure 9. The causal chain of the bad life, drawn by Armin W. Geertz.
- Figure 10. Illustration of Hopi hermeneutics by Armin W. Geertz. Originally published in Geertz 1990a:329.
- Figure 11. Illustration of ethnohermeneutics as a textual tool, drawn by Armin W. Geertz.
- Figure 12. Illustration of ethnohermeneutics as the third perspective, drawn by Armin W. Geertz.

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BOOK REVIEWS

ALBERT I. BAUMGARTEN (ed.), *Sacrifice in Religious Experience* (NUMEN Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions, 93)—Leiden, Boston, Köln: E.J. Brill 2002 (329 p.) ISBN 90 04 12483 7 (hb.) US\$ 105.00.

Sixteen articles are here collected from two conferences held at Bar-Ilan University. The first focused on sacrifices involving an actual offering placed on an altar, the second on alternatives to such ritual. An illuminating grouping. The introduction stresses the diversity which characterizes this “primary” and “central” form of religious ritual. Some of the historical articles should be featured in the opinion of this reviewer. N. Bellayche shows how the Emperor Julian’s numerous sacrificial acts were rejected by Neoplatonists and Christians alike. She shows the link between possession of goods and hierarchies: rulers are rich, their power must be made manifest by abundant gifts to the gods. Dominant theologies however could not see the necessary link between high politics and low butchery. B. Chilton further elaborates his views on the crisis in the life of Jesus and constructs a link between the failure to cleanse the Temple and the innovative eucharistic meal. From then on, there is an alternative to the temple-based, priest-operated cultus, the egalitarian sharing of bread and wine in a meal. J.A. Harris treats the theme of the body as temple in the High Middle Ages; she shows how altars started being screened in imitation of the Temple when the interpretation of the eucharist became strongly sacrificial. The idea of the body as temple also transformed the theological view of human nature: reading, memory and self-knowledge become central to piety.

Three articles offer major methodological arguments. S. Sered unveils homologies between sacrificial and gendering practices: historical and cultural forms of embodiment are being constructed in each case. In sacrifices the practice of embodiment is defined by specifying disembodiment. Men are heroic warriors and have the privilege to kill sacrificial victims. (Both are deliberate acts of choice.) They give the meaning to life, that is, overcome death by knowing for sure when and how to bring it about. She reminds us of something commonly forgotten: until recently the giving of life by women through giving birth was involuntary. G. Palmer analyses *The Third Pillar*, the work of

S. Morgenstern focusing on Shoah, and notes an irony: the three monotheisms declared that sacrifice was superfluous and yet, in times of severe trouble, sacrificology regains vigorous life: while not demanded by God or law, while not offered willingly, sacrifice still seems to demand a recognition as some sort of reward. During catastrophes humans may show regressive tendencies; in any case the impossibility of progress needs to be accepted — and is a modest progress.

I.F. Silber offers a useful survey of gift-giving in the “great religions,” sacrifice being conceived as a sub-type of giving. She differentiates giving to the gods, to the religious institution and to the poor. She notes in the three monotheistic faiths a greater emphasis on the asymmetrical features of religious giving and a growing emphasis on gifts to the needy (with documentation for medieval Christianity). She defends the view that sacrifice had to decline for charitable giving to be able to rise. The whole collection, in the end, leaves this reviewer with a bizarre feeling. On the one hand, “sacrifice” establishes a rich semantic field where comparative study is rewarded. On the other hand, specific studies tend to show the heterogeneity of the historical and cultural contexts in which “sacrifices” are performed. In this connection, S. Sered’s article emerges as must reading.

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HANS G. KIPPENBERG and KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* — München: Verlag C.H. Beck 2003 (230 p.) ISBN 3-406-50207-5 (pbk.) EUR 19.90.

Recent years have seen a growing number of conceptual or introductory textbooks in the field of religious studies (*Religionswissenschaft*) not only in the English-speaking world but also in Germany. *Grundzüge der Religionswissenschaft* by Fritz Stolz, originally published in 1988 came out in its third revised edition in 2001 and in the following year Klaus Hock presented his new *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*. Now the German publisher

C.H. Beck has released another book with the very same title which is placed in the widely acknowledged series of academic introductions "Beck Studium": *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* by Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad.

The book contains an introduction, four major chapters, and a comprehensive appendix. The four chapters are titled "the cultural history of religious studies," "theoretical perspectives," "public arenas" and "collective action." The appendix provides addresses of the relevant university departments in Germany including internet addresses, an annotated compilation of important research tools (academic journals, encyclopedias, introductory works) and an index of names and subjects that opens up the surprising abundance of philosophers, scientists, and concepts brought up in this volume.

Kippenberg and von Stuckrad are presenting a new approach to the academic study of religion which they understand as a "cultural science" (Kulturwissenschaft) in contrast to what they consider an either phenomenological or functionalist approach. What indeed separates this volume from previous introductory works is its explicitly innovative attitude: The book covers a very wide scope of topics with special emphasis on those subjects that have received less attention in previous introductions such as: religious violence, religion and law, religion and gender. The authors' intention as is argued repeatedly is to demonstrate that religion indeed matters as an important factor in today's seemingly secularized world and, even more, within those social and cultural spheres one might not think of in the first place: political rhetorics, Hollywood movies, the internet and the like. It is very deserving that Kippenberg and von Stuckrad avoid to confront beginners with a too narrow and conservative outline of the subject matter of *Religionswissenschaft*. They demonstrate that the academic study of religion is not only concerned with the historical development of "traditional" religions and that it methodically goes far beyond the study of ancient religious scriptures. On the other hand this book tends to obscure what is actually done in the academic study of religion in Germany since the authors do not pay much attention to the traditional research agenda of the discipline. And they explicitly do not want to do so since some of the very basic theoretical problems like the definition, classification and explanation of religious phenomena are simply declared idle questions.

The text of this book contains some mistakes. The colleague of Durkheim and Mauss mentioned in chapter one ("Hubert Henri") is in fact Henri

Hubert (p. 18). And although there is no doubt that the Western conception of Zen Buddhism is heavily shaped by modern Japanese authors, it would be rather misleading to uninformed readers to state that Zen was a Neo-Buddhist invention of Meiji Japan (p. 48). Furthermore, the era of Meiji did not end in 1914 (p. 48) but in 1912. Quite generally, the dates given in this volume are sometimes inaccurate: Rodney Stark's reconstruction of membership development in American churches presented in "The Churching of America," we are told, has become a fundament of his rational choice theory of religion (p. 167). This concept, however, was developed by Stark in "A Theory of Religion" and published in 1987—five years before "The Churching of America" came out in 1992. Another example: Kippenberg and von Stuckrad discuss the old debate among historians about on the empirical adequacy of any historical narration. Droysen's critical reflection on this subject, they say, had been forgotten and "recently" (p. 40) was picked up again. This amazing insight is proven with reference to "Koselleck 1995." This is, however, an unaltered reprint of a collection of Koselleck's essays (*Vergangene Zukunft*) that originally came out in 1979, not in 1989 as the authors state (p. 197). And the very article to which "Koselleck 1995" refers is from 1976.

Finally, the third edition of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, still widely used, was published 1957 to 1962 and not, as the readers are told, 1962 to 1986 (p. 191). And Mircea Eliade's well known *Encyclopedia of Religion* came out in 1987 and not in 1995 (p. 191). These are, of course, minor inaccuracies but since the book explicitly addresses beginners in the study of religion, one should expect at least the bibliographical data of the very fundamental research tools to be reliable.

To whom could this book be recommended? The title, it seems to me, is somewhat misleading. The book does not really offer an introduction to the academic study of religion as it is done at German universities today. It does, however, invite its readers to an understanding of how the authors want it to be. *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* is an extended programmatic essay presenting a very new conception of the discipline. Those readers who are interested in what is possible in religious study today will enjoy this book very much, especially when they appreciate its sophisticated reasoning. For beginners in the field this volume might be confusing. It thus can be recommended without reservation only to those readers who have

already gained a certain idea of what *Religionswissenschaft* is from more conventional introductions such as the fine book by Fritz Stolz.

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PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Books

(Listing in this section does not preclude subsequent reviewing)

Kippenberg, Hans G. and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe* — München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2003, 230 p., €19.90, ISBN 3-406-50207-5 (pbk.).

Zeidan, David, *The Resurgence of Religion. A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses*. NUMEN Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions, 96 — Leiden, Boston, Köln, E.J. Brill, 2003, 390 p., US\$ 97.00, ISBN 90-04-128778 (hb.).

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- Dreyfus, Georges B.J., *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping. The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* — Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2003, 445 p., \$ 24.95, ISBN 0-520-23260 (pbk.).
- Cartwright, Jane (ed.), *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults* — Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003, 339 p., £17.50, ISBN 0-7083-1749-9 (pbk.); £40.00, ISBN 0-7083-1750-2 (hb.).
- Bouvrie, Synnøve des (ed.), *Myth and Symbol I. Symbolic phenomena in ancient Greek culture. Papers from the first international symposium on symbolism at the University of Tromsø, June 4-7, 1998. Papers from the Norwegian Institute of Athens, 5* — Bergen 2002, 332 p, ISBN 82-91626-21-9 (pbk.).
- Maier, Bernhard, *Die Religion der Germanen. Götter, Mythen, Weltbild* — München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2003, 206 p., €24.90, ISBN 3-406-50280-6 (cloth).
- Burkert, Walter, *Die Griechen und der Orient. Von Homer bis zu den Magiern. Aus dem Italienischen ins Deutsche übertragen vom Verfasser* — München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2003, 176 p., €19.90, ISBN 3-406-50247-4 (cloth).

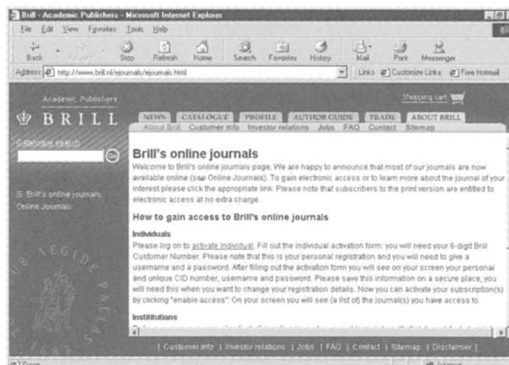
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NVMEN

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW FOR THE
HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

EDITED ON BEHALF OF THE

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

by

E. THOMASSEN, M. DESPLAND and G. BENAVIDES

VOLUME L

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2003

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*International
Review for the History
of Religions*

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PUBLISHER: Brill Academic Publishers
PUBLISHED: Four times a year: January, April, July and October.
SUBSCRIPTION: The subscription price of volume 51 (2004) is EUR 187.- / US\$ 234.- for institutions and EUR 92.- / US\$ 115.- for individuals, *inclusive of postage and handling charges*. All prices are exclusive of VAT in EU-countries (VAT not applicable outside the EU). Price includes online subscription.

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LEIDEN · BOSTON

ISSN 0029-5973 (print version); 1568-5276 (online version)
Printed in The Netherlands

Printed on acid-free paper

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Numen is edited on behalf of the International Association for the History of Religions by Einar Thomassen and Gustavo Benavides

Volume L, 4

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DE-CENTRING RELIGIOUS SINGULARITY: THE GLOBALIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY AS A CASE IN POINT¹

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Summary

Recent scholarship in religious studies has again questioned the validity of the idea of religions and of certain religions in particular, such as Hinduism. The debate raises the question of how any religion, including Christianity, can be thought of or lived as a singular identity in today's world. While this is a very broad question with a very long history, this presentation translates the matter into one of the relation between globalization, localization, and religion. It argues that in the more recent phases of historical globalization, the issue of unity, identity, and singularity in religion has fundamentally changed from one which depends on a hierarchical and core/periphery distribution of defining power to one in which singularity is the observed or recognized outcome of multiple localizations of a contested and global model. Thus the singularity of a religion is not just the product of uneven power relations between those who get to define and those who do not, but rather the internally and externally observed synthesis of plural glocalizations. This abstract thesis is illustrated on hand of an examination of developments in global Christianity especially in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Introduction: Orthodoxy, Identity, and Difference in Modern Religions

During a recent oral comprehensive examination in my department, the student was asked to comment on the relation between unity and diversity in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. His answer was interesting for what it revealed about the more general question of religious unity and singularity, both within and without the Christian fold. In brief, the student tried to contrast what he, for argument's sake, called

¹ This article is a revised version of a lecture given at the 3rd congress of the European Association for the Study of Religion, which was also a Special Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, held in Bergen, Norway, 8–10 May, 2003.

a Western and an Eastern attitude to unity. In the former, different partners (churches) would get together to find that they agreed on 80% of everything and therefore there was no reason to let the other 20% get in the way of unity. In the Eastern version, by contrast, a clear sense of what constituted the essentials required that partners agree on 100% of those essentials, failing which there would be no point in talking about unity; it was either present or it was not, and in the case of the Orthodox churches, it was. While we may question whether such a neat division exists between Western and Eastern Christian attitudes, the response does rather intriguingly point to different possibilities for constructing and conceiving religious boundaries and, by extension, for understanding how religion as such operates in our contemporary social world. The intriguing aspect lies in the fact that while this “East/West” distinction, on first glance, may seem quite insightful, a shift in perspective can make it appear far less significant. Thus the “80%” threshold of the “Westerners” may hide within itself a group of “essentials” quite as non-negotiable as the parallel list of the “Easterners”; and it may be this implicit list that makes dialogue possible. Conversely, the “unanimity on essentials” of the “Easterners” may allow just as much practical disunity on the basis of “secondary” items as is evident among the “Westerners” in light of the “20%” upon which they do not agree. Therefore, just as one often hears the dictum that Americans are less and Europeans more religious than they pretend to be, so we might say that the Eastern Orthodox Christians are less and Western Christians more united than they pretend to be. Whatever conclusion one favours, the comparison points to the general question of how one establishes religious boundaries; how one generates religious identities and differences. Indirectly, however, it also raises the issue of how we create the boundaries of religion as such, not just between and within religions.

In the academic disciplines that study it, discussions about conceiving and defining religion have been as unresolvable as they have been constant (see, e.g., Banton 1966; Clarke and Byrne 1993; Hervieu-Léger 1993; McCutcheon 1999; O’Toole 1984). Such debates, important and interesting as they are for scientific and theological discourse,

are somewhat tangential to the concerns that I have just introduced. To say that they are tangential is not to claim that they are irrelevant, but only to signal that scientists and theologians are only two sets of players in the social processes that determine how religion is delimited, reproduced, and understood in our society. The larger religious, political, legal, and other non-expert authorities, along with the mass of the believers and practitioners of religion and religions, are at least as significant in this regard. In the final analysis, I would say, they are more so. When I raise the question of religious boundaries, therefore, I intend primarily these larger social processes in which the experts participate, but which they do not by themselves determine. That said, certain aspects of academic debates about the concept of religion are useful for carrying my analysis further.

Within these recent debates, one line of thought questions the utility of the concept of religion as such, suggesting either that we all abandon it (Fitzgerald 1997; W.C. Smith 1991), or at least that we reduce it to an entirely analytic category, valid only for the purposes of scientific observation (J.Z. Smith 1982). Another direction accepts that such a thing as religion exists, but that it is at best an illusion and at worst an expression of political manipulation to treat it as something independent and differentiable, in McCutcheon's term (McCutcheon 1997), as a reality *sui generis* (cf. Asad 1993; Chidester 1996). Embedded within both perspectives, however, is not so much a denial that religion can be a differentiated or delimited quality, but rather that it would be better if it were not one; that differentiated religion is for one reason or another inherently problematic. Without denying the many excellent insights that much of this literature has provided, I would suggest that most of it focusses too narrowly on the scientific, theological, or ethical observation of religion and only from those perspectives on whether, how, and with what consequences the category of religion actually operates in society, in particular contemporary global society. I mention two examples to clarify further what I mean. The first concerns Hinduism. There now exists a rather large literature that addresses the legitimacy or illegitimacy of this term. A not inconsiderable number of those involved argue that, because Westerners were involved in the invention of this

idea and because the majority of those in South Asia whom many identify as Hindu would not recognize themselves in the term, that therefore Hinduism is somehow only an orientalist or comprador projection (see, as examples, Balagangadhara 1994; Fitzgerald 1990; Frykenberg 1989; King 1999). Although these critiques definitely have their cogency, they also tend to ignore the question of how and to what degree these projections have actually succeeded in generating the social reality that they imagine. A second example concerns religion in East Asia. Here many observers have remarked that what Westerners might identify as, say, Chinese or Japanese religion is not at all a clearly differentiated social domain; and that insiders to this region share this opinion (see, as examples, Chan 1978; Earhart 1982; Hardacre 1989; Jensen 1997; Paper 1995; Thal 2002; Yang 1967). Here as well, the critique and the insight are important, but they bracket, even if they do not deny, the development in these same regions not only of indigenous concepts to correspond to the term religion, but also the indigenous application of those terms to indigenous realities such as Daoism or Buddhism. The upshot of such considerations is not that the prevalent critique of the use of the concept of religion along with its denominated religions is wrongheaded, but rather that it often goes too far, underplaying the complexity of social realities for the sake of correcting what are no longer deemed to be justifiable ways of observing.

Symptomatic of the way in which the more radical critiques go too far is the fact that, in spite of them, the scientific and theological worlds by and large continue to research, teach, reflect, and operate in a practical way as if both religion and, just as importantly, a specific, quite limited set of religions are self-evidently out there in the world. This is above all, but certainly not exclusively, the case for what one might call the R5, parallel to the G8, namely Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism. Rather than attributing this fact to some sort of persistent orientalist blindness on the part of so many observers, more likely is that the experts are simply reflecting aspects of how contemporary society has been constructed. In other words, the critiques of differentiated, *sui generis* religion and religions are less effective than one might expect them to be because in actual social

practice, religion and religions are to a significant degree differentiated as such. If that is the case, then the question becomes how and to what extent are they thus differentiated, and how did this situation come about.

On the basis of these introductory remarks, I want to take a closer look at this question of how the current differentiation of religion and religions may have come about, and what are some of its main features. In this context, I will be particularly concerned with how religions come to be identified, in what consists their singularity or identity. And, rather than focus on more problematic and contested cases such as the already mentioned examples of Hinduism or East Asian religion, I am going to choose Christianity as my primary religion of reference. The singularity and distinction of this religion is questioned far less often than are those of other religions, and yet the processes, contestations, and ambiguities are not really all that different. Moreover, as my opening anecdote about the comprehensive examination question indicates, certain dimensions of the religious singularity issue may be particularly well illustrated in the case of Christianity, especially with respect to the relations between religious singularity, orthodoxy, authenticity, and authority. My contention is that religions in today's world, to the extent that they are constructed as differentiated social forms, accomplish this result through a globally extended and multi-centred process which, rather than favouring a centre-periphery strategy such as, in the case of Christianity at least, may have prevailed in the past, proceeds by way of the multiple particularization of a general and somewhat imprecise universal model that nevertheless exhibits clear structures. These particularizations, or glocalizations (Robertson 1992; Robertson 1995), of an effectively global universal identify the religion of Christianity with reference to one another, or at least with the effective recognition of one another, whether through specific movements like the ecumenical movement, through specific organizations like the World Council of Churches (WCC), or even in conflictual and contested mode through the overt questioning of each other's legitimacy. The globalized nature of this reconstruction is key as a condition for its de-centring. Completing this

internal process of identification through mutual self-reference is the equally clear distinction of this conglomerate Christianity from other delimited religions and, just as important, from other, non-religious domains like state, economy, science, and art.

The remainder of my presentation consists of three parts. In the next section, I pay some attention to the historical construction of what, in Luhmannian mode (Luhmann 1984; Luhmann 1997), I call the religious system of global society, this with primary reference to Christianity. Here I will try to show how the de-centring of Christianity was an integral aspect of its modern reconstruction as a religion. In a second section, I then look at a number of examples of this multi-centred particularization of the Christian global universal and the contribution of these localizations to the singularity of this religion. A third and concluding section situates Christian reconstruction as one of the religions in the context of other religions and analogous, secular domains such as polity, science, and economy.

The Historical Emergence of a Multi-Centred Christianity in the European West

From very early in its history, Christian religion developed a very strong organized face with centralized authorities effective in many parts of the Mediterranean world in which it emerged and eventually became the dominant religious form. Such organization and centralization, however, did not exclude the development of various alternative Christian movements. It is in part in contrast to some of these that the central authorities defined and asserted themselves, condemning the former as heresies and seeking their eradication. Some of those directions labelled as heresies survived quite well over the centuries, above all the Monophysites in Egypt and the Nestorians to the east of the Roman empire. With the spread of Islam in the latter regions and in North Africa after the 6th century, these alternatives in any case became cut off and all but forgotten by both the Western and Eastern authorities. Besides such plurality of Christian directions, popular Christian expression also developed which was not always well controlled by the central authorities in Rome, Constantinople, or, eventually, Moscow.

Thus, what we have in this first one and a half millennia of Christian history is a kind of core/periphery, “great tradition” / “little tradition” structure in which centralized authorities claimed definitive power over questions of both belief and practice, and the allegiance of the entire population of large territories; but in which that authority was in actual fact quite limited in geographical and demographic terms. To the extent that there was an effective singularity, it rested in the centralized authorities.

This brief consideration of the Christian situation up to the late Middle Ages is important in order to understand the nature of the change ushered in with the Reformation period. One must dispel the notion from the beginning that we are dealing with a simple transition from unity and singularity to one of division and multiplicity. Rather, analogous and parallel to the transformations in the overall society, it is the way that unity and diversity came to be constructed and understood that changed. Two very much related dimensions of the change are, I suggest, key. One has to do with the further differentiation of religion from other societal domains; the other concerns new internal divisions of the thus more differentiated religious sphere. These are two sides of the same coin.

If one takes seriously the declared intention of the Protestant Reformers of the beginning of the 16th century, the purpose of their efforts was the purification of Christian religion and its corporate social embodiment, the church. Religion was to be the domain of God and his relation to human beings and the world. Doctrines such as the justification by faith alone and the insistence on the absolute sovereignty of God aimed at asserting this clarity or, what amounts to the same, this clearer differentiation of the religious domain from “worldly” ones. Accordingly, the Reformers had initially to proceed anti-institutionally because, from their perspective, the authoritative church that prevailed in their regions was too much interwoven precisely in these worldly concerns and seemed to them to be operating too much by worldly standards. Corresponding to this “anti-worldly” impulse, however, was something of the opposite, and this was the sacralization of everyday life through such ideas as the divinely sanctioned calling and the priest-

hood of all believers. Another way of putting this combination is to say that the Reformers wished to purify the religious domain, but at the same time make it more thoroughly applicable to all aspects of life in the world. This blend of differentiation and totalization is typical of the societal function systems that have come to dominate modern and now global society, systems that include the global capitalist economy, the global system of sovereign states, of empirical science, academic education, religion, and others (Beyer 1998). I discuss these further below.

It was not the intention of the Reformers to bring about Christian disunity; their aim was reformation and the rectifying of orthodoxy. Like so many reform movements throughout history, they legitimated their enterprise by claiming to restore an original authenticity rather than simply offering an alternative. Somewhat ironically, it is actually disunity that resulted in the wake of their success, and this again both because of what transpired outside the increasingly differentiated religious domain and what correspondingly happened within. Almost immediately, the impulse of the Reformers brought about the engagement of the hitherto standard way of understanding religious difference religiously: mutual accusations of heresy and, in effect, apostasy. The other side of the religious form could not yet be what it became subsequently, another religion. The as yet singular conception of *religio* required the contrasting form to be non-religion, heresy or apostasy especially, but also superstition or heathenism/paganism (see Harrison 1990; Pailin 1984). Given the way that orthodox religious authority had been constructed in Western Europe of the time, the situation could only lead to religious conflict, but the fact that it led to seemingly perpetual religious war points to the other side of early modern European developments. Even as religious ferment eventuated in the Reformation movements, so were multiple political powers increasingly consolidating and asserting themselves. The divisions created by the former may have eventually been reined in during another time; in the early 16th century they were taken up and solidified by the logic of the European state formation process, itself symptomatic of the differentiation of a political system parallel to the religious one that the Re-

formers sought to amplify. Thus the solution that the Europeans found for the conflictual ambiguity of the religious situation was to piggy-back religious division onto state formation, the Westphalian formula of *cuius regio, eius religio*, resulting in a series of state churches, both Protestant and Catholic, that tried to create something like a segmented version of the religious unity that existed before. The process received further solidification in many countries in the late 18th to 19th century as state legitimation switched from an absolutist to a nationalist principle, resulting in an approximation of, as it were, *cuius natio, eius religio*. During this later period as well, the logic spread to the Eastern Orthodox churches, generating a larger series of national Orthodox churches (see Roudometof 2001). As in the case of the Western European Catholic countries, however, this nationalization of churches did not preclude the continued and even strengthened viability of what now could be recognized as, often controversial, transnational religious organizations and authorities. This aspect of the situation, in turn, points to the fact that the religio-political pluralization of religion was not the only important transformation going on.

Ironically perhaps, at the same time as we witness the solidification of national and state churches in Europe, other developments in the religious sphere were generating multi-centredness along different, not necessarily national lines. As I noted above, the differentiating logic of the Reformers sought to rid religion of its worldly accretions; it also demanded the greater sacralization of everyday, profane life. Differentiation and totalization were of a piece. Accordingly, already beginning in the 16th century, but increasingly thereafter, various movements such as Anabaptism, Puritanism, Pietism, and then Methodism, Evangelicalism, and Catholic devotionalism sought to “deepen” the influence of differentiated religion among its nominal adherents in a way quite parallel to the kind of “colonization of the life-world” that other systems were pursuing through, for instance, accreditation, commodification, or regulation. These movements had a very broad influence across religious subgroups and across nations. It is, however, indicative that they did not lead to the greater unification of Christian religion in terms of convergent authority structures or organizationally. If anything, they

had the opposite effect, further pluralizing the Christian religious fold in both these respects. That said, the pluralization effect in this regard seems to have been mostly accidental. It did not flow necessarily from the structural logic of the developing religious system. In other words, pluralization, to the extent that it was furthered by such intensification movements, happened because no religious or non-religious force could or did prevent it. Thus, in the Catholic church, the 19th century devotional revolution was part of a movement towards greater convergence; among the Protestants it resulted in further organizational and movement proliferation.

This overview of more or less strictly European (plus the European migrant societies of North America and Australasia) developments remains very incomplete until we add into the range of vision the larger globalizing circumstance in which they occurred. It is far from insignificant that the period from the 16th to the 20th centuries was also the period of the gradual but ever more powerful expansion of European influence throughout the globe and of the responses that this evoked in the various regions that had hitherto followed more or less independent historical trajectories. As concerns Christianity, the singularity of this religion as well as the pattern of its pluralization and the structure of its multi-centredness were greatly determined through both the expansion and the responses. Above all, the factors that the global dimension added were other cultures (or whichever word among the several available that one wants to use for social otherness) or, broadly speaking, other social contexts, and other religions. I look first at the latter and then the former.

In the context of its greater differentiation, the conflictual pluralization of Christian religion in Reformation and post-Reformation Europe brought with it a highly significant transformation in the Western understanding of the category of religion. From a diffusely singular concept, it developed into a specifically plural one, meaning that religion came to be conceived as a distinct domain in contrast to other non-religious domains; and one that manifested itself in the form of plural and discrete religions, now in the plural. The reverse side of the pluralization and differentiation of Christian religion was the imagination of

Christianity as one of several religions, notably in traditional European parlance, Mohametanism, Judaism, and paganism or heathenism (see Despland 1979; Harrison 1990; Smith 1991). In the situation of European expansion, this change was greatly reinforced and developed through the encounter with what Europeans saw and non-Europeans to a significant extent helped to reconstruct as other religions, including the remaining two of today's R5, Buddhism and Hinduism (Almond 1988; Dalmia and Stietencron 1995; Marshall 1970; Sontheimer and Kulke 1989). These various other religions, even if one wishes to regard them as largely European orientalist projections — and I would insist that many of them have for quite some time been much more than this — have provided the necessary context of mutual identification in which Christianity, in spite of its greater and different pluralization, could maintain itself as a singular religion and indeed as one of the religions. In this respect, the modernly reconstructed other religions may to some extent be the product of Christian modelling, but that Christian model is to a similar extent a product of the same historical developments. Christians could move to a pluralization which could come to be regarded as a matter of so many Christian alternatives because they also had the examples of alternative non-Christian religions literally before their eyes. The change did not eliminate the possibility of continuing to see religious difference in terms of such notions as heresy, heathendom, and superstition; but it did add to them the notion of “different religions” and restrict the conditions under which the more dismissive concepts could be used effectively. In order to understand those changed conditions properly, however, we also have to take into account what above I alluded to as the factor of cultural otherness.

The spread of European influence was much more than the migration of Europeans as powerful agents. In religious terms, it involved more than the migration of European Christians and their descendants. The enormous Christian missionary activity that was such an integral part of the expansion aimed at producing and produced in fact large numbers of non-European Christians (Neill 1986), to such an extent that today continued missionary activity contains important cross-flows and reverse-flows, from previously missionized areas to

the European heartlands and to other previously missionized areas. The reason that this aspect is so important is that, although European and Euro-American missionaries have generally — but by no means always — tried to export their versions of Christianity complete with what we would now call their cultural characteristics, the Christian convert recipients have over time generated their own renderings more suited to local cultural styles and influenced by more local reform, revival, and prophetic movements. Sometimes these localized versions are very similar to what was originally exported, sometimes they have come to be quite different in important respects. Moreover, the regions from which the original missionaries came have themselves been witness to cultural and religious transformations, such that the originally exported versions may no longer really exist in those areas. However particular situations have turned out, in sending or receiving country, the upshot of this historical trajectory is that Christianity, like other religions by the way, has become a global and globalized religion, but only in the form of numerous particular or local alternatives, most of which can successfully make their claim to Christian authenticity. The implication is that the culturally particular Christian versions of the European heartland can no longer claim to be the accepted standard by which others are judged; and those historical heartlands have long since ceased to be the only important source of movements for renewal and reform. Thus, today we have various culturally localized variations on what we might call otherwise standardized forms of Christianity (Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, and many others), as well as a continuing stream of new versions of Christianity or its subforms which, if successful, will repeat the process of creating localized and “inculturated” variants of themselves in different parts of the world. All this follows, in globalized form, the logic of the post-Reformation transformations of the religious field in Europe, not so much in its specifics — although core distinctions like Protestant/Catholic are still meaningful — as in the way that it reproduces Christian identity and Christian difference. This brings me back to the question of authority and orthodoxy or, how what counts as Christianity is determined in such circumstances.

The structural and ideational logic of the post-Reformation situation in Europe was that religious authority and religious authenticity or legitimacy became separated. The first highly conflictual centuries, which in some ways continued into the 19th century, required a transitional mechanism to manage a situation in which there was still the expectation of a congruence between authority and authenticity, but in which this was precisely what had ceased to exist; and in which there was a significant increase in the social and personal depth to which religious determinations of life were expected to reach. One could almost say that the division of Christianity was a condition for the possibility of its expansion in social breadth and personal depth (cf. Stark and Bainbridge 1987). The transitional mechanism was the piggybacking of religious difference onto developing political difference in the form of state and national churches. It allowed the temporary territorialization of religious authority and associated authenticity with the authority of the state and in many cases with the authenticity of the cultural nation. While this solution provided an important buffer to conflict, it did not fundamentally alter the direction that the reconstruction of the religious domain was taking because it facilitated rather than prevented the multiple localization or particularization of religion, including religious authority and authenticity, on the basis of a presumed and to some extent implicit universal model of a religion called Christianity. As the effective enforcement of religious authority declined — or, what amounts to the same, as the effective separation of church and state authority increased — the result became clearer: a plurality of authentic localizations of Christianity with the question of religious authority largely divorced from that of authenticity or legitimacy. In those circumstances, the challenge which the “churches” faced was to prevent the new structural situation from undermining the very possibility of convergent religious form, that is, the dissolution of recognizable religions. The prevailing solution that most Christian particularizations adopted was one that already had a long history in the Christian tradition: organization. Whether we are speaking of the Roman Catholic church, the various established Protestant churches, or the numerous “dissenting,” “voluntary,” and sectarian churches, authority or conver-

gence became the task of organized churches based on voluntary involvement or membership.

Ironically perhaps, in this reconstructed context, orthodoxy or “correct” religion does not in any sense disappear or become meaningless. Instead, “orthodoxy” becomes an alternative next to the others. This optional nature of correctness is illustrated nicely in both Christianity and Judaism, in both of which certain subvariants carry the name of “Orthodox,” often claim a monopoly on orthodoxy as such, and yet are in actual effect only one particularization of these religions. Similarly, the claim to universalism or catholicity also continues in the very name of a Christian subgroup (albeit a very, very large one) whereas this church is neither catholic in fact nor does it generally behave like it is even in principle. Overall, the seemingly paradoxical nature of this circumstance is typical of contemporary globalized society. In Roland Robertson’s terminology, global universals exist and manifest themselves only through a plurality of localized particularizations, and these particularizations identify themselves substantially in terms of globalized models (Robertson 1992). Far from excluding claims to universal validity, to normativity, it merely relativizes them as a contingent option among others. The whole in global society is optional; it is, if you will, a part like any other.

Two tasks now remain to round out this presentation. In a next section, I will flesh out some of the major points by looking at a sample of particular Christian religious forms or variants, namely African Independent Churches, Pentecostalism, the liberation theological movement, and the World Council of Churches. In the section following, then, I look again at the question of how a single Christianity, and by extension, any religion and the religious system as a whole, is meaningful and possible in this context.

Particularizing Universal Christianity: Some Examples Considered

African Christianity and the African Independent Churches

In most of sub-Saharan Africa, the arrival of Christianity coincides with European expansion and the sending of European Christian mis-

sionaries to these regions. Especially in the 19th century do we see the acceleration and intensification of such efforts to cover almost all areas of the southern portion of the continent. As much of the literature on the subject exposes, these missionaries came to spread versions of their religion that were heavily characterized by European cultural features and by the religious movements, such as the ones that I have had occasion to mention, which arose in the European context. In particular, the missionaries were generally sent by particular European Christian denominations or national churches, sometimes from missionary societies in which several of these collaborated (Clarke 1986; Neill 1986). Although success was moderate, the Europeans did manage to set up their respective churches in the areas where they found themselves; and these churches bore many of the characteristics of their sending versions (Hastings 1996; Isichei 1995). Virtually from the beginning, many of the new African Christians adapted their new religion to their own and different cultural forms and priorities, for instance by putting a far greater emphasis on the ability of the Christian God to bring practical and this worldly benefits, particularly as concerns personal healing. Since especially the Protestant missionaries set translation of the Bible into local languages as a high priority, the African Christians relatively early learned to read the Christian scriptures and inevitably interpreted them in ways different from their European mentors. The net result of many complex developments is that the African Christian churches of today, when they still belong to the original European denominations, show their own distinct characteristics in emphasis, in Biblical interpretation, in ritual form and style, and in ecclesiastical governance, to mention only some of the most obvious.

This difference is even more pronounced in African churches that are independent of the originally European sending denominations, the African Independent (sometimes: Instituted) Churches, or AICs. In many cases, such as the Aladura churches of Nigeria, the Kimbanguist churches of the Congo, and the Zionist churches of South Africa, these were founded by independent prophets or leaders who broke away from the Europeans precisely because these did not seem to offer the Christian message in a sufficiently African form or one that

bore too little relation to the way many Africans viewed the world and their situation in it (Maboia 1994; Ositelu 2002). The status of the AICs *vis-à-vis* other Christian versions has in several cases been quite controversial, with many of those who represented the European-based versions disputing whether they were sufficiently Christian at all. The combination of indigenously African and more traditionally Christian motifs in many of them would in fact pose the question of which source is the more determinative, whether these churches are more versions of African Traditional Religion or Christianity. This is a question of religious boundaries that is typical of a religious system in which mutual identification of religions from each other is an important structural feature (cf. Mndende 1998). It cannot really be decided on the basis of some neutral or general criteria because none exist, or at least they have to be formulated in the very process of making the mutual identifications. Accordingly, AICs are today generally considered part of the Christian fold, although some of the historical suspicion from the denominations of European origins remains. The cases of the Kimbanguist and Aladura churches being accepted as members of the World Council of Churches would seem to be the clearest cases where this question has been answered organizationally in the affirmative (Pobee 2002). The parallel cases of the Southern African Zionist churches and many others remain more ambiguous. The significance of the WCC and parallel ecumenical bodies in these matters is a subject that I discuss below, but here it is important to underscore the degree to which the formation of different versions of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa has almost automatically raised the practical question of Christian unity, and that this question tends to be addressed not by the older hierarchical means — if you do not recognize a particular central authority, you are outside the fold — but rather in typically modern fashion of trying to include the variety in a multi-centred, pluralistic, and be it noted, organizational as well as theological way.

Pentecostalism

The case of the worldwide Pentecostal movement is similar to that of the AICs but also in critical ways quite different. Pentecostalism emerged in the early 20th century in already a multi-centred way. In terms of substance, it had its roots in Methodist, Evangelical, and Holiness movements of the 18th and 19th centuries; it apparently had its beginnings in multiple geographical centres ranging from India and Britain to the United States, although the self-description of the movement standardly locates that beginning in 1906 with the Reverend Seymour's revival meetings on Azusa Street in Los Angeles (Wilkinson 1999). This origin story also points to the substantial admixture of African and African American religious style in Pentecostalism. Altogether, these features indicate a movement that was globalized from early on, both in its geographical reach and in the sources of recombined elements. Most importantly for my concerns here, Pentecostalism, while defining itself internally (as well as being observed externally) as a singular movement of the Christian Spirit (that Spirit emphasis itself being an aspect of its resonance with African forms of Christianity), was in practice a multi-centred one from the beginning, never defining itself in centre/periphery terms or with respect to one or even a very few clearly privileged centres of authority and authenticity. There are today and have been virtually from the beginning of the movement, multiple Pentecostalsisms, such that, if it were not for the deliberate and conscious self-identification of so many of its manifestations around the world as part of the same thing, one would be tempted to say that the word Pentecostal describes a style of Christianity rather than a defined movement. As it stands, there is such identification: Pentecostalsists read each others literature, attend worldwide Pentecostalist conferences, have their leaders visit other Pentecostal churches around the world, and thematize the global nature of their movement in their local practices, publications, sermons, and discussions (Coleman 2000; Cox 1995; Martin 1990). Different local Pentecostal churches establish transnational links and even branches in other countries, thus globalizing localized versions translocally. In this they are similar to many

other, more tightly organized Christian denominations. Nonetheless, and this is a point of special importance, the variety of Pentecostal forms of religious expression is also quite wide. The typical Pentecostal church in say, Latin America, can in style, ritual practice, and emphasis be very different from Pentecostal churches in Sweden, Korea, Ghana, Ethiopia, or Sri Lanka. And these all can in turn be quite different from each other. This “internal” variety manifests itself again when the adherents of these different Pentecostalsisms migrate to other parts of the world, thereby transplanting their particularized versions such that the different versions are not only aware of each other, but exist geographically in the same place and often belong to the same local umbrella organizations (Wilkinson 1999). The interrelations, far from undermining the differences, actually are part of the process of constructing and preserving them, such that there seems to be no serious trend toward homogenization as a result. In spite of the fact that the majority of Pentecostal churches do not belong to the large “mainline” umbrella ecumenical organizations and movements, they nonetheless demonstrate in their structure and practice how a multi-centred religion, Christianity in this case, can remain singular in practice and not just from the perspective of analytic observation. Thus Pentecostalism, like Christianity, is not just a label of convenience, but an operative singularity in the social world that we inhabit.

Liberation Theology

There are, however, movements within Christianity that are more purely particular trends, commonalities of style and substance rather than defined subdivisions like denominations and churches. Under this heading one could put, as examples, liberation theology, evangelicalism, or, if one simply calls it charismatic Christianity, Pentecostalism. Here I focus on liberation theology. It will allow me to illustrate my main point as well as the other two.

With antecedents in post World War II political theology centred in Europe, liberation theology emerged out of Latin America in the 1960s, in part a product of the ferment of the early post-Vatican II era (Berryman 1987; Boff and Boff 1987; C. Smith 1991). Like Pente-

costalism, therefore, the impulse toward liberation theology occurred in more than one region, even though in terms of the trajectory of the movement, one region, Latin America has a clear primacy. During the late 1960s up to the early 1980s especially, this theological orientation became a practical movement within the churches to which its proponents belonged, mainline liberal Protestant ones, but especially the Roman Catholic church. In Latin America, one might say that it had its heyday during these approximately one and half decades, receiving particular impetus and visibility from its roles in promoting social change and even revolution in various countries ranging from Brazil and Chile to El Salvador and Nicaragua. Today, although it is not as visible as it once was, liberation theology remains an important option within many of the churches, both in Latin America and elsewhere (Sigmund 1990). Indeed, its relatively early spread beyond Latin America is what makes it peculiarly apt for illustrating the main point I am trying to make here. From North America, the Caribbean, and Europe, to Southern Africa, India, the Philippines, and Korea, liberation theology has been adopted and adapted by Christians in a whole range of regions and countries (Ferm 1986). The emphasis is always recognizably the same, an understanding of Christian faith and an interpretation of the Christian sources as the grounds for bringing about practical social change aimed at a more just society with more equitable distribution of power, influence, and life chances. Like Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism, liberation theology represents one of those Christian orientations and styles which, while perhaps having their origins in one part of the world and in certain divisions of Christianity rather than others, have spread to virtually every part of the Christian world, albeit — and this point is just as critical — in particularized forms. Like Christianity as a whole, liberation theology has become a kind of global universal that receives expression in various particular and localized variants. This is the case for all manifestations of this Christian direction, including the liberation theology of Latin America. It too has evolved over the decades, re-particularized itself, if you will (cf. McGovern 1989). Above all, no more than in the case of American Pentecostalism, does Latin American liberation theology set

some kind of implicit or explicit standard of authenticity for the other versions. It thereby parallels in its way of realizing itself the religion as a whole: globalized localizations at the same time as localized globalizations, neither being primary, and no sub-variants having anything put symbolic priority of authenticity or authority.

The World Council of Churches

The importance of the World Council of Churches in the current context lies as much in what it is as in what it is not. As perhaps the largest organization representing the broad ecumenical movement within contemporary Christianity, it had its antecedents in the missionary movement of the early 20th century and took on its present form as a international non-governmental organization of some note in 1948 (Lefever 1987; VanElderen and Conway 2001), at around the same time as quite a number of other global organizations, including, a bit earlier, the United Nations. Its similarity and difference with respect to the latter is instructive. On the one hand, the WCC, like the UN, had global pretensions from the very beginning, even though it was in its earlier period largely the expression of only the large, mainline or national Western churches. In addition, beginning in the 1960s, this pattern of domination gradually altered to a degree as an increasing number of “Third World” churches gained fuller membership and succeeded in putting many of their concerns among the priorities of the organization. The WCC is always open to the inclusion of new members, its criteria being somewhat loose and certainly not including any really meaningful test of orthodoxy. It operates more on the 80% agree / 20% disagree principle I mentioned at the beginning and only much more indirectly on the basis of essential criteria. Moreover, like the United Nations in the political sphere, the WCC also has more of a consultative, even symbolic importance than it has any real authority in world Christianity. On the other hand, the WCC is also unlike the United Nations in critical respects, the most important of which is that, without the artifice of territorial states with precise and contiguous boundaries that cover the entire globe, Christianity, like religion more generally, has no equivalent of territorial-based sovereignty, and

therefore no handy mechanism for symbolizing the inclusion of all its subdivisions. Many churches and Christian groupings are not and do not want to be members of the WCC, in particular a rather large portion of the Evangelical sector which, by the way, also has its own ecumenical associations. In addition, the Roman Catholic church has never become a full member of the WCC, even though it has participated in its activities and collaborated with it on a number of fronts. The WCC, therefore, can justifiably claim to represent churches that cover the entire globe, but it cannot and does not claim to represent Christianity as a whole. Nor does it have or claim to have broad religious authority or to be able to determine questions of Christian authenticity. Its importance in the present context is nonetheless precisely in this combination: it expresses the unity of Christianity without thereby constituting or assuring it. The different particularizations of Christianity, both within and outside the WCC, are the real and effective centres of authority and authenticity, the localizations are the reality of the global reality, or in Robertsonian fashion, social reality in global society is for the most part primarily glocal. To the extent that the WCC exercises influence in the Christian world, it is only as yet another localization or particularization. Just like those Christian churches that claim (implicitly or explicitly) to be the only centre of orthodoxy, the whole that is the WCC is also but a part, not even the sum of the parts and especially not more than the sum of the parts. And yet, having said that, the WCC is also important because it embodies the self-conception of Christianity as a singular religion and not, in the final analysis as either more than one religion or religion in general. Two corollaries of this claim are therefore that Christianity is but one religion among others; and that the context of these religions is not religion in general, but non-religion. It is to a consideration of this dimension of the issue that I now turn in my concluding section.

Christianity and Religions as the Religious System of Global Society

The other side of the reconstructive coin is obviously that which is not Christianity; any identity requires this difference to be effective. Two aspects of this question are critical, namely those things that are

not Christianity but are still constructed and count as religion, and those things that are not religion but are nonetheless similar structures in other respects. It is beyond the scope of a short presentation like this to deal with either of these matters properly. In the case of my own theorizing about these issues, it would require the introduction of a complicated conceptual apparatus that I have adapted from the sociological work of Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 1984; Luhmann 1997; Luhmann 2000), in itself a task not to be completed in a few pages. I shall refrain from doing that except with respect to the idea of societal system, which is critical for understanding the remainder of what I have to say.

From a Luhmannian perspective, the historical emergence of contemporary global society has everything to do with a shift in the primary way society came to compose its dominant communicative subunits. Rather than building society primarily — and therefore by no means to exclusion — with reference to divisions between one segment (village, locality, kinship unit, etc.) and another, or between core and periphery (e.g. metropolis vs. hinterland), or between hierarchically ordered status groups (noble vs. common), the modern and globalizing society that began to assert its dominance in the European region in practical terms beginning around the 15th century constructed and constructs its primary social subunits according to function or instrumentality, according to the kind of power, if you will, that each subunit is supposed to produce. European imperial expansion was based on the greater effective power that this shift afforded its carriers; and the incorporation and inclusion of other regions into the current global social system or society is based on the appropriation and further construction of these subunits or function systems in other regions and by actors in those regions. In tune with my arguments concerning Christianity in the previous sections, the construction of these systems may have initially been and looked like a European imposition on the rest of the world, but it was also all along a matter of appropriation by non-Europeans and, most importantly for my purposes here, of the further and even only actual construction of those systems as they were appropriated. In global/local terms, like Christianity, these systems con-

structed themselves in the form of local particularizations of a set of global universal models in which the Western localization is not simply to be identified with the global universal. As with Christianity, these systems have come to be constructed as glocalizations, as the simultaneity of the global and the local.

Among the function systems thus produced, one specializes in what people around the world now understand as religion in the modern sense of a kind of activity that manifests itself primarily as a series of more or less mutually identified religions, and certainly not in terms of something like a global religion. Beside this religious system are others, some of which are far more clearly and powerfully constructed than religion, others of which share religion's more ambiguous construction and lesser degree of influence. The former include systems for capitalist economy, sovereign state based politics, positive law, and empirical science. Among the latter are systems for academic education, medicalized health, competitive sport, mass media based information, and art. Overall, while these are the dominant social systems of global society, they by no means constitute everything that happens in that society. They are not society split up into so many pieces of a pie so much as they are power centres that radiate their structures and process so as to influence virtually everything that happens in that society.

Christianity fits into this theoretical frame as one religion among several or many, as a subsystem of the religious system which in turn is a subsystem of the overall society. The question that remains to be treated therefore is the relation of Christianity as a religion to other religions and the relation of religion to other function systems; and these matters primarily with respect to the role that these relations play in the singular yet multi-centred imagination or construction of Christianity.

The reconstruction of Christianity along the lines that I have analyzed occurred in a context that included fundamental transformation of European society and, at the same time, European expansion of influence eventually to include the entire globe. In this complex historical process, the European carriers of Christian religion encountered a

wider range of “others” far more closely than they had before. Their dominant tendency was to categorize these others as barbarian and religiously heathen; and through the missionary movement to attempt to convert and civilize them, the two often being considered to be of a piece. They had, however, also begun to reconstruct their understanding of religion to that of a differentiable domain that was in principle plural, consisting not just of religion, but also of religions. Accordingly, besides heathendom, they also “discovered” other religions in the process of their imperial endeavours; and what is more important still, representatives of the others that they encountered appropriated their new understanding of religion and either set about reconstructing their own indigenous traditions as religions like, but also different from, Christianity; or explicitly rejected that trajectory for their own traditions, in either case helping to further define and concretize this new systemic and pluralized notion of religion. The historical outcome thus far has been the clearest reconstruction along these lines of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, but also Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Baha’i, and a variable group of others, depending on region. The carriers of Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, and quite a number of, for lack of a better term, aboriginal religious traditions have either refused to do likewise or have done so only very partially and haltingly. A very large portion of the world’s potentially religious activity has been incorporated to a greater or lesser degree into these reconstructed religions; meaning of course that much else has not. The systems, including the religious one, tend toward totalization, but none of them has become or is likely to become encompassing.

In this situation of multiple reconstructed religion, Christianity occupies a very important place and is, beside Islam, the single most influential such religion in the world today. Yet it is not simply the standard model which determines or is projected upon the rest. Historically, the multi-centred Christianity that I have partially described was spurred to that reconstruction, not only by internal dynamics, but also just as critically by the reconstruction in its environment of these other religions. Christianity today is singular to the degree that it is to a large extent in contrast to these other religions. Missionary competition in

colonial regions, juxtaposition in regions that now have a significant representation of many religions as a result of missionizing and migration, and even interreligious dialogue have contributed to this result; as have, by the way, the treatment and thematization of religion in the processes of other societal domains, notably the state, education, and mass media, all of which have tended to accept the existence and mutually exclusive identification of the religions and the particular religions I have mentioned.

The last statement brings us, finally, to a consideration of the part played in this identification and construction process by the other systems. The thematization of religions in the form of state regulation, curriculum teaching, or media coverage, for instance, is the smaller, but nonetheless quite important, portion of it. Weightier is the very fact that these other institutional domains or function systems have been constructed precisely as something other than religion, as non-religion. Put differently, the feature of these other systems that is critical for the differentiation and distinction of the religions and religion is their secularization. This does not mean that religion need be irrelevant in these other domains, let alone the simplistic and incorrect idea that religion is doomed to decline and disappear in this context. It does mean that these other systems operate by different logics than does reconstructed religion. Thus where we might say that religion is about God, enlightenment, ritualistic communication with divine realities, and so forth, other systems are principally about other things. Economy is about generating and exchanging commodified goods; politics is about enforceable regulation and collective obligation; science about producing empirically verifiable knowledge; mass media about informing; health about medicalized diagnosis and treatment; education about instruction and accreditation. The domain of religion in part defines itself in relation to these other institutional specializations, and not infrequently enters into close relation and even competition with them. Nothing prevents religious instances from attempting to have their religious priorities affect the operation of these other systems; anymore that there is anything to prevent business people from attempting to influence government policy, scientific research, educational curricula, and so forth.

Yet it is just in these relations and competition that religion, like the other systems, also further defines itself. Typically, religion claims to specialize in the representation of another, transcendent or more ultimately real realm, the other world or another purportedly more basic level of existence, as it were. Other systems, by defining contrast, specialize in other things which, of course, can also help to determine what counts as religion and how that operates.

In sum, then, what the other religions and the other systems accomplish with respect to the singularity of religion, and of Christianity in particular, is a contrasting context of similar or analogous social structures in terms of which the extremely diverse and non-hierarchically ordered multi-centredness of Christianity can still operate effectively and practically as a kind of unity. In that context, and to return to the anecdote with which I started, the 80% that the different centres have in common *and* the 20% that they do not are, perhaps almost paradoxically, more important for generating that practical unity than is either an implicit or explicit set of 100% essentials. These latter may be critical for the self-conception and operation of different Christian versions, including most especially Catholicism and Orthodoxy, but they are not the basis upon which the singularity and differentiated unity of Christianity are attained or even attainable. Moreover, and finally, this conclusion would seem to me to be valid for all religions, not just Christianity. Glocalized multi-centredness is a defining feature of the religions that dominate the structure of the global religious system. Christianity is neither the dominant standard in this regard, nor is it the Western exception. It is simply one, perhaps the largest, but only one of the religions.

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THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIONS¹

INA WUNN

Summary

The article contributes to a theoretical framework for a theory that describes and explains the distribution and development of the various religions from a genetical and historical point of view. While religious evolution until now has been understood as a process of progress, the theory outlined in this paper focuses on the biological Theory of Evolution in order to direct the attention to the main characteristics of natural evolutionary processes. By drawing parallels between biological and religious evolution the evolution of religions is described as the adaptive modification of religions throughout history. After discussing the question of a natural systematic unit in the world of religions, the different means of evolutionary processes are investigated. As a result, a theory is presented that understands the development of religions in a way which explains their recent phenotype as well as their modifications during history.

1. Introduction

Hardly any scientific theory had such an impact on the worldview of the nineteenth and twentieth century as Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. In 1859 Darwin's famous book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* overthrew the traditional religious and philosophical interpretations of life. The former theologian and naturalist, who had circumnavigated the globe on the *Beagle*, established that the existence of the many recent species and the different faunas of the geological record were neither the result of one or several acts of creation nor of various catastrophes, but of a natural process lasting millions of years. Since Darwin had created a sensation with his

¹ Without specific acknowledgement I have incorporated a very large number of suggestions, both general and specific, provided mainly by Einar Thomassen, Peter Antes, Paul Hoyningen-Huene, and an anonymous reviewer. I am more than grateful for their kind help. The shortcomings of the paper are, however, exclusively mine.

thesis, his evolutionary sequence at once started to capture the imagination of his contemporaries. Great minds began exploring the world from the new evolutionary point of view, busy organising the facts that were being turned up in every field of research into the new scheme of scientific interpretation. Crucial points of the new theory were still not understood, however. Darwin, and together with him the highly gifted Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), had found out that variability and natural selection were the main causes of the changes occurring in organisms; therefore, evolution had to be seen as a process of adaptation to a certain environment. Their contemporaries, however, focussed on explaining cultural and sociological change as a process of continual progress. (Cf. Bowler 2000.)

In this scientific atmosphere, scholars of the humanities such as Edward B. Tylor and James G. Frazer assimilated the new direction of research into their work and tried to find evolutionary sequences in the vast field of anthropology. Their theoretical approach, however, remained bound to the ideas of unilinear and progressive development as exemplified by the British philosopher Herbert Spencer and others. Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), one of the founders of anthropology as the science of man and his culture, developed a theory of the evolution of civilisation in which primitive man had chronological priority and was considered to be close to prehistoric man. The evolution not only of civilisation, but also of religion was seen as a process involving three successive stages, one arising from the other. The first stage of savagery was characterised by a still primitive form of religion, which consisted in the belief in spirits (animism) and developed into ancestor worship (Tylor 1970:425). At the second stage polytheism is the dominant belief, and the third stage was a highly developed monotheism, as exemplified in the British protestant churches (*ibid.* 432–433). While Tylor used myth, religious practice, folklore and custom as evidence for the acquired stage of civilisation, it was ultimately the technical and economical superiority of a few European and North-American nations and its striking contrast to the material culture of primitive man which led him to look for a theory that would explain

civilisation in contrast to savagery and barbarism as the last and most developed one in a succession of different stages (Tylor 1866:2).

After a short climax in the last decades of the nineteenth century evolutionary ideas have had their days in the humanities (Rensch 1972:836). The First World War belied the optimistic prognoses of their advocates, and the results of ethnographic research ultimately did not fit the simple scheme of primitive savages or barbarians on the one hand and highly civilised races on the other. The study of religions in particular provided data regarding the religions of traditional peoples which had hardly anything to do with animism or ancestor-worship (Waardenburg 1999:220–243). As a result, other theories such as functionalism or structuralism dominated the discussion among scholars of religion (Kohl 1997:58; Stolz 1988:201–206). Only the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century gave rise again to evolutionary theories, ostensibly less ethnocentric than the classical evolutionary theories and taking several limiting factors into consideration (Stolz 1988:206). They describe, as Fritz Stolz emphasises, a development in accordance with that of biological evolution. The essential qualities of these new evolutionary theories in the study of religion were especially apparent in the well-known and widely discussed classification system of Robert Bellah (Bellah 1970:20–50). In his research Bellah focussed mainly on contemporary problems of religious development in highly industrialised nations such as the United States or modern Asia, which he wanted to comprehend and integrate into a developmental scheme. Hence he referred to a generally accepted typology of societies and their accompanying religions, relying on the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Bellah's classification of religions includes all recent religions as well as the religions of the societies of the past and is therefore assumed to describe a religious development from low to high variety and complexity. This is, as Bellah emphasises, a development in accordance with that of biological evolution (Bellah 1970:21). Religious evolution, as Bellah sees it, has direction and purpose. It is understood as a process of increasing complexity and independence from the environment, leading from the stage of primitive religion to those of archaic religion, classical reli-

gion, early-modern religion, and modern religion, the latter being the typical form of religion in the most industrialised countries of today. According to Bellah, the causes of evolution are processes of diversification, which finally lead to greater complexity and independence of the evolving entities.

Bellah's opinion is shared by many sociologists and scholars in the history of religions even today. In Germany, for example, the sociologist Günter Dux understands evolution as a progressive process leading from protozoa to more complicated organisms, then to primitive man and finally to the most developed humans of the highly civilised nations. This ascending process is characterised by increasing knowledge and personal freedom of decision (Dux 1982).

The idea of religious and social evolution as an ascending process of increasing perfection hardly differs from the common views of nineteenth century evolutionary biology. Biology itself was reluctant to dispense with ideas originating in the philosophy of the enlightenment and granted evolution a certain direction. Ernst Haeckel's (1834–1919) reconstruction of a phylogenetic tree of the animal kingdom emphasises the single phylogenetic line that leads from reptiles to mammals and then directly to primates and man. Other biological orders are included only as a kind of side-branches, so that evolution ultimately seems to aim at the emergence of man.² Even after the Darwinian Theory of Evolution had finally prevailed, ideas of alleged evolutionary tendencies were introduced again and became known as so-called orthogenesis (cf., e.g. Rensch 1991). In contrast to all those various theories that want to impute a certain direction on evolutionary development, however, evolution has to be seen as an undirected process mainly controlled by mere chance. One of the most influential evolutionary biologists of today, Ernst Mayr, characterises evolution as a two-step process: "The first step consists of the production of variation in every generation, that is, of suitable genetic or phenotypic

² Haeckel 1902:675. Ernst Haeckel, a famous German biologist, was an enthusiastic supporter of Darwinism, who introduced the Darwinian Theory of Evolution into German biology.

variants that can serve as the material of selection, and this will then be exposed to the process of selection. The first step of variation is completely independent of the actual selection process, and yet selection would not be possible without the continuous restoration of variability.”

Therefore, the crucial difference between recent biological and non-biological theories can be described as follows: in biology, evolution is defined as the adaptive modification of organisms through time by means of natural variability and selection. In the study of religion, however, as well as in other disciplines of the humanities, the term evolution is still understood as a process of progressive development. The idea of progress and improvement throughout history leads to the ascription of certain attributes to the described religion, which is then classified as either primitive, archaic or advanced. Such a procedure can only lead to classifying religions according to a theory of gradual stages. Only a precise consideration of historical sequences in religion and their unique attributes may, however, result in a true evolutionary theory in the study of religion, whereby religions are classified according to how they are related to other religions, and not according to their assumed stage of progress. The term religious evolution, therefore, cannot define stages of development or complexity; however, in accordance with a biological understanding of evolution, it may describe the adaptive modification of religion(s) throughout history.

2. The characteristics of an evolutionary theory

The aim of this research therefore is to present a theory that understands the development of religions in a way which explains their recent phenotype as well as their modifications during history. According to the Austrian biologist and philosopher Franz Wuketits the development of any system can be described as an evolution (Wuketits 1995:7). This is only partly correct, since the biological Theory of Evolution is characterised as a two-step process of variation and independent selection (Mayr 1988:98; see above). It is obvious, however, that the same mechanisms are responsible for the change of religions as well. According to the evolutionary biologist Francisco

J. Ayala the application of any evolutionary theory has to be guided by three main questions: (1) Did the objects under question change? (2) If they did, how did the change or the development proceed? Are there any sequences or distinct evolutionary lines? (3) Which mechanisms control this development? (Cf. Wuketits 1995:10–12.)

That means for our field of research: (1) Do religions change during history? (2) Are there any related religions? Do they probably have a common origin? (3) Which mechanisms control the evolution of religions? What are the means of religious evolution?

3. *Do religions change during history, and are there any related religions?*

No religion appeared suddenly without precedents. On the contrary, religion develops and changes during history according to its economical, sociological and natural environment. Religions adopt foreign customs and assimilate proven and successful symbols. The Christian religion may serve as an example for both the continuity and change of mentality. Christianity originated in Judaism, integrated Greek philosophy and religious thought, and developed these ideas into an independent and successful religion.

This example — and many more can be easily found — may serve as evidence that religions do in fact change over time. The second question has already been answered. Religions are related to each other. Christianity, for example, is closely related to Judaism and Islam. Also the religions of the Indian subcontinent mostly share a common origin and therefore are related to each other.

Naturally there is much more evidence of evolutionary sequences in the history of religions. The examples mentioned above and below are only meant to illustrate the theory. It is important, however, not to confuse the theory of religious evolution with evolutionary classification. An evolutionary classification of the various religions only comes as a second step and has to be based on the evolutionary theory, which I will outline in this paper. A new classification, however, will not be the work of only a few weeks. In biology, scholars needed

more than 200 years to classify the known species and have not finished their task until now.

It should be added that the origin of a new religion has nothing to do with the question of the beginning of religion. The appearance of a new religion only means that a mother-religion underwent fundamental changes, so that it finally splits up in two or more different and distinct religions (Judaism and Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism).

4. The evolving unit

One of the main difficulties in all evolutionary theories is the question of the evolving unit. In biology the evolving unit is obviously the species. In the humanities the question seems to be more difficult. Tylor, for example, looked upon his three different developmental stages as the evolving units. Consequently, he interpreted the different religions representing each of the developmental stages as being variations of the same type. In spite of Tylor's biological understanding of evolution, the wrong choice of the evolving unit led him to misunderstand the relationship among the various religions (Tylor 1970:2–30).

In biology, the evolving unit, the species, evolves over time. With regard to religions, the inquiry into evolution seems to be more problematic. Religions obviously undergo certain modifications during history. The belief-systems of the devotees vary, religious practice and holy traditions may change. But drawing a clear-cut classificatory line between two successive religions is sometimes impossible, even if the religion in question has a founder. Christianity, for example, was first understood as a mere reform movement within Judaism. The situation in biology, however, is not as clear as one may think. Even species are no fixed units, as far as their traits are concerned. The change of the phenotype is continuous. Drawing a classificatory line between two successive species is sometimes hardly possible, though in practice this dilemma seldom appears because the discontinuity of the geological record suggests clear distinctions even between successive species that do not exist in nature. Even the definition of the species is not as unproblematic as it seems to non-biologists (cf. Mayr 1967:22–25). During the nineteenth century the typological concept of the

species was still dominant. A species was understood as a natural kind or class, whose members shared a common essence. Today this conception of a species is no longer acceptable, because “it forces its adherents to consider as species even different phena within a population, and to lump groups of sibling species in a single species” (Mayr 1988:316). Tylor’s opinion that the different religions of a single developmental stage represent varieties of the same unit is probably due to his typological conception of the biological species. Recent biology, however, sees the species as a reproductive community, where individuals share the same gene pool. “Species are groups of interbreeding natural populations that are reproductively isolated from other such groups” (*ibid.* 318). “The isolating mechanisms of a species are a protective device for well-integrated genotypes” (*ibid.* 318).

In contrast to a typological understanding of religion, guided by a set of traits, a more organic conception of religion has to understand the *natural unit religion* as a complex of well adapted belief-systems and religious practices. As a result, religion as a natural unit is characterised by three aspects:³ 1) Religions as units in religious systematics are not defined by the similarity of their traits, but by a clear distinction from other religions. 2) Religions consist of groups of followers (according to populations in biology) and not of independent individuals. 3) Religions as units are defined by their relation to groups of believers of other religions and not by their relation to members of the same religion (isolation). As a result, religions are not accidental sets of individuals with similar religious ideas and practices, but units of devotees who recognise each other as members of the same belief-system. Therefore, religion as a systematic unit is not something arbitrary, but the natural result of a consensus concerning religious thought and acts which is distinct from that of other religions (cf. Mayr 1967:29).

³ We follow Mayr’s views on the biological definition of the species: Mayr 1967:28.

5. *The means of religious evolution*

Variation

Even a cursory observation of the various religions makes clear that the religious ideas of the believers often differ in detail. The differences may concern the concepts of the supreme being, the interpretation of the holy narratives, ideas about death and the afterlife, etc. At least in religions with a written tradition those little differences remain on the level of personal religious conviction and are of little importance for the future development of the religion in question. The basis of the doctrine is more or less fixed. Matters are different as far as the religious specialists are concerned. The interpretation of the holy scriptures, the holy narratives and the holy traditions change from generation to generation, as the development of theological research and speculation demonstrates. Theology also influences the religious convictions of the devotees. But even among the laypeople themselves differences in convictions lead to slow change. These observations are true not only for the Christian religion. The Indian-born scholar and practising Hindu Kabita Rump observes: "Hinduism with its high level of self-determination granted to the believers . . . offers its followers countless ways to experience the absolute truth" (Rump 1998:5). Within each religion new interpretations of the old traditions emerge as a variation that may be meaningful only for a few believers or may obtain a number of followers for a short period until it disappears again. It is also possible that the new variety of the religion in question will later emerge as a distinct and independent religion. Such changes, as exemplified above, are easy to detect in religions with written tradition, but they also exist in religions having only oral traditions. The ethnologist Paul Radin (1883–1953) was among the first to show that belief, religious talent and religious interest is by far not as equally distributed among the members of an ethnic community as the reports of many scholars seemed to assume (Radin n.d.). Variability within religions without written traditions is common, especially because no doctrine and no religious establishment exist. The East-Asian Ainu may serve as one among numerous possible

examples. Before this people was conquered by the Japanese about one thousand years ago, they had a feudal state. In agreement with their social organisation of that time they knew a polytheistic pantheon and worshipped several gods and goddesses. Only when they had to withdraw from the conquerors and were forced into the role of hunter-gatherers, they developed their more recent religious views (Adami 1991).

As a result it can be pointed out that religious convictions and traditions and the resulting religious practices of a religion vary. Hardly two followers of a religion will have exactly the same ideas about the supreme being, the spirits, or the afterlife. Also, religious practice will change, either because deviations appear within the tradition by chance or because reform movements introduce certain alterations.

Selection

While several changes in the belief-system persist and even spread out, others remain meaningful only for few people and finally disappear. Evidently, religious traditions are exposed to forces which can either promote or hamper new ideas. Obviously specific religious needs may promote the emergence of varieties within a religion. Some varieties may establish themselves as religious communities and succeed in winning followers. An example of such a successful variation of a traditional religion is the sect of the Mormons. Other religious movements succeed only for a short period, until they become extinct, as the example of the various cults of the Roman empire shows. These few examples may be sufficient to show that religions and reform movements within religions are exposed to selective forces. Selection, which controls the change of organisms as well as the stability of the species, is also responsible for the stability and change of religions. On the level of regional religious groups the influence of the community tends to standardise religious thought; variations hardly succeed in gaining a foothold. Only unusual modifications of the environment of the religion in question will lead to the emergence of more variety and the increasing success of variants. During the last decades of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the renaissance, for example, political and

economical crisis in Europe led to the emergence of several Christian sects that turned out to be successful. Within ancient Judaism, the conquest by the Romans led to an instability of the political environment which resulted in the appearance of several reform movements within the established religion. Most of those movements became victims of selection as the Romans crushed the different revolts. In the case of the South-American Maya the natural environment is one possible factor responsible for the deselection of the classical Maya religion, which disappeared suddenly without any obvious reason. Recent estimates of the density of population and new insight into the agricultural techniques have led to the conclusion that population pressure and environmental problems were responsible for the collapse of Maya culture and religion (Culbert 1992:245). In the case of Christian sects, selection has been due not to the environment, but to competition within the religion itself. The same situation is known from biology, where different varieties of a species compete until one or several varieties succeed. In certain regions of post-medieval Europe it was the Lutheran Church that eventually won the competition and managed to survive.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that religions are subject to selection. Selection takes place within the religion itself, when deviations in the religious tradition appear but are not maintained. If variations within a religion manage to establish themselves, interreligious competition may subsequently lead to their extinction. On the other hand extinction may be the fate of a religion if environmental factors lead to its annihilation.

Religions have to compete and to succeed in the struggle for existence. Selection acts on different levels: Selection takes place already on the level of personal religious convictions. Variations that cannot convince will disappear from the palette of religious ideas. The same obtains for varieties of religious thought within groups: they disappear if no followers can be found. On the other hand selection can lead to the extinction of complete religions within defined geographical areas, as the example of the persecution of Judaism in medieval Spain during the Reconquista shows.

In this context, some traits of a given religion prove to be more resistant to selection than others. As a general tendency, it can be observed that religious narratives such as myths are open to variation, whereas ritual is more bound to tradition. Sometimes rituals are still performed according to the prototype even if the initial reason for the ritual has been forgotten. The author of this article, for example, was able to take part in a rite of initiation among the East African Makonde, the so-called *ngoma*. The participants of the ceremony, however, neither knew the origin of the ritual nor its purpose.⁴ Iconography as a part of religious symbolism is most resistant to change. Certain symbols not only accompany a religion during the whole span of its existence, but may also be taken over by daughter-religions or neighbouring religions, where they appear in a similar context. An example of this is the image of Isis with her child, which was taken over by Christianity as a representation of the Virgin Mary (cf. Wunn 2002). This typical conservatism of iconography is highly relevant for the systematic of religions and the reconstruction of genetic relationships. Recently, this insight has proved methodically useful for the reconstruction of Neolithic religions (Wunn 2001). It was also used several years ago to prove the relatedness of a group of African religions. Hans Witte, a specialist in African religions, states: “[Die] Ikonographie, die eine äußerst wichtige Informationsquelle in zahlreichen afrikanischen Religionen darstellt, kann zu einer sehr wertvollen Quelle für die Erforschung der religiösen Ideen werden. . . .Die Ikonographie ist eine Hilfswissenschaft” (Witte 1978:210).

Environment

The various examples mentioned above do not only demonstrate the significance of selection and variation, but also the importance of the environment of the religion in question. The environment of a religion is constituted by the social organisation, the natural environment, the economical conditions and the political configuration.

⁴ Unpublished observations among the Makonde, Tanzania, 1986–1989.

The influence of the social organisation is beyond doubt. Sociological typologies help to show that religions react directly on any modification within the social organisation. As soon as societies alter, several modifications of the related religion become inevitable. While religious change from the primal religion of hunter-gatherers to an archaic religion of early farmers has usually been interpreted as a natural progress within the historical development, more careful study shows the general interdependence of social organisation and type of religion (Gusinde 1966). If the social organisation of a given society changes as the result of certain political circumstances, its religion will change as well. In the case of the Ainu, to mention only one example, their former gods were modified and the worship of the gods disappeared to make place for new rituals.

The influence of natural environmental factors cannot be denied once the example of the Maya is taken into consideration. In this case the influence of the natural environment had an immense effect on a complete culture and, in consequence, the related religion. On the other hand the influence of the natural environment has become evident in the field of religious symbolism and iconography through the work of the art historian Aby Warburg, who has coined new concepts for the understanding of the cultural expression of human consciousness and behaviour. Warburg characterised his object of research as the historical development of forms of non-verbal communication arising from human affections, in particular as expressed through religious art. According to him, fear is the dominant human emotion, which not only finds a form of expression in religious art, but triggers every form of cultural activity. Human beings find themselves in a chaotic world. Especially in nature unknown phenomena give rise to fear. This outlook on life leads to specific forms of religious expression such as idol, symbol or sign. The cultural expression of fear results in a metaphorical language which can be detected in any religion (Warburg 1996).

Economic conditions have an impact on religions in so far as they are responsible for the prosperity of any culture and, consequently, for the success of the related religion. Economical problems may

result in certain modifications of the established religion. As examples the medieval witch hunt or the recent forms of fundamentalism in several major religions can be mentioned (cf. Baroja 1964; Wielandt 2000). The direct impact of economical factors on a religion becomes transparently clear from a comparison of pastoral societies on the one hand and primal farmers on the other hand. While pastoral societies in general worship a High God, primal farmers usually believe in the existence of mythical ancestors (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Jensen 1948).

Political change and development may also influence the success of a religion, for example the expansion of Islam as a result of the Islamic conquest between the years 632 and 711, or the emperor Ashoka's (272–232) promotion of Buddhism in India. Also Christianity owes its spread to the Roman Empire and the conquests of the European imperial powers.

The religious neighbourhood is part of the environment and may influence the evolution of a given religion. Thus Dravidian religions had an impact on the religion of the conquering Aryans and contributed to the evolution of Hinduism (Glasenapp 1926:152–153). The religions of ancient Greece and Rome integrated the religious ideas of their neighbours, which became part of their own myths and traditions.

Thus environment has a strong impact on the evolution of religions. This means that environment in the evolution of religions is something essentially different from environment in biological evolution. The early French Biologist Etienne Geoffroy St. Hilaire was convinced that species adapt directly to a changing environment, but only a few decades later Wallace and Darwin dispensed with this idea. In biology, the environment only has an indirect impact on evolutionary direction through the mechanism of selection. This is completely different as far as the evolution of religions is concerned. As exemplified above, religions react quickly and directly as soon as environmental changes arise. In this case, religions do not react blindly as biological organisms do. On the contrary, they react directly by focussing on new elements of their tradition or by bringing in new ideas or interpretations. As a next step, the heredity of the traits of the modified religion can be realised directly via oral information. In the case of the

evolution of religion, heredity of genetically encoded information with its accidental results does not exist. Religions undergo modification as soon as the environment changes. Modifications are transmitted directly as a reaction to new religious needs. Variability and heredity are therefore directly dependent on the environment, only then does selection set in.

Adaptation

“Adaptedness is the morphological, physiological, and behavioral equipment of a species or of a member of a species that permits it to compete successfully with other members of its own species or with individuals of other species and that permits it to tolerate the extant physical environment” (Mayr 1988:135). In this sense, “the fitness of an organism is its propensity to survive and reproduce in a particular specified environment and population” (*ibid.* 97). In nature, adaptation and fitness are closely related to the survival of the phenotype. Only well adapted individuals survive and reproduce successfully. If the fitness of an individual is not sufficient compared to the fitness of a competitor, it will become a victim of selection. That means, too, that a certain behaviour leading to a disadvantage, to a decrease in reproductive ability or, in the worst case, to death, will minimise its fitness. Religions with their multiple manifestations, however, are hardly suited to increase biological fitness.⁵ Martyrdom, celibacy, and extreme forms of circumcision in connection with initiation rituals are only a few examples from the world of religion that make it clear that religions sometimes reduce biological fitness. With regard to religions, the slogan “survival of the fittest” therefore does not mean the biological survival of the followers of the religion under question. Since reproductive processes within religions are not bound to physiological processes of propagation of new individuals, but take place in the form of communication, the survival of a religion is only indirectly bound to the physiological survival of its followers (of course no religion can exist without any followers). Religious

⁵ A different opinion is expressed in Campbell 1976.

fitness therefore is a result of successful communication, including the persuasiveness of religious ideas and religious actions. In this regard, certain actions that reduce the biological fitness of a person can easily promote a religious idea. The perseverance of Christian martyrs, for example, was one of the factors leading to the expansion of the young Christian religion (Slusser 1992:209). Only few centuries later a different religion proved to be better adapted in the same geographical region. Islam started its triumphant advance during the life-time of the Prophet and was soon able to expand as far as Spain in the West and India in the East. According to Peter Antes, the great success of the new religion on the Arabian Peninsula was due to the political and religious conditions prevalent during that time. Politically, Islam constituted a reliable connecting element, being able to replace the old tribal organisation. As far as religious thought was concerned, the old worldview was already in a transition stage. The belief in local gods had mainly disappeared and the idea of a High God was at least already known (Antes 1992:95, 99). These circumstances formed the ideal ecological niche for the new religion of Islam.

The adaptiveness of religion, therefore, has to be understood as the adjustment of a religion to given circumstances. Adaptation requires information about the relevant environmental conditions. This information can be acquired through tradition (as through heredity in biological adaptation) or through individual or group experience. Adaptiveness therefore means the equipment of a certain religion with substance and ideas, symbolised in images, rituals, and organisation, enabling the religion to compete successfully with other religions or with different varieties within the religion itself, and to sustain successfully its social and natural environment. Adaptation therefore means enlarged psychological and sociological efficiency and enlarged capability in dealing with all transcendent or supernatural forces (cf. Antes 1986–1996:1543).

Since religions react directly to environmental changes by means of increased and directed variability, one could come to the conclusion that religions are perfectly adapted to their particular environment. For a better understanding of the issue at hand the conditions of

biological adaptation are briefly described below. Plants and animals are certainly adapted to their specific niche, which is the outward projection of the needs of an organism. Even if organisms are well adapted to their specific niche, which is a “multidimensional resource space” (Mayr 1988:135), this does not mean that adaptation leads to the exploitation of all resources—in biology several examples of unexploited niches are well known (*ibid.* 135–136). Adaptation also does not mean a precise fit between species and the natural selection pressures, because the phenotypes are the result of a historical consecution of different and separate developmental steps. Several components of the phenotype are inherited from the ancestors and only tolerated by selection, but they have not been developed for the existence in the specific ecological niche the organism currently occupies (*ibid.* 136, 140). The same is true for religions. Mainly old religions with written traditions often carry with them ideas that were developed centuries ago as a result of an arrangement with the environment of that time, and which nowadays are thought to be problematic. As far as Christianity is concerned, the German scholar Hans-Peter Hasenfratz has specified the crucial points in this regard, which are Gnostic traditions, the relationship between church and government, the position of women, religion and daily life, magic and spirituality (Hasenfratz 1992; cf. Antes 1985:104–105). On the other hand various religious niches remain unoccupied, probably because several evolutionary steps (such as the emergence of a certain doctrine) during history prevented the religion from adapting to these niches. According to the conviction of many contemporary Europeans, the inherited interpretative schemes of Christian religion do not allow satisfactory identification of personal religious experience (Antes 1985:133). In the meantime modern technical communicative innovation allows foreign religions to enter free niches and occupy them successfully. Hasenfratz takes the following view of the matter:

Eine entzauberte, säkularisierte, partikularisierte Welt aber schreit nach “Wieder-verzauberung,” “Resakralisierung.”... Dieser Schrei wird heute durch “Sin-nangebote mit Instant-Charakter” im Multi-Pack konsumentenfreundlich “aufge-fangen” und medial vermarktet. Zur Deckung der Sinn-Nachfrage schlachten die

kommerziellen Sinn-Stifter die gesamte Menschheits- und Religionsgeschichte aus ... sibirischer Schamanismus, Magie, Witchcraft, indianische Öko-Mystik, Kundalini-Yoga, Zen-Meditation, das tibetanische Totenbuch, das Totenbuch der Maya, das Totenbuch des Islam, Reinkarnation, Spiritismus, Spiritualismus, Okkultismus, Hermetismus, esoterische Mysteriosophie, Sufi-Tanz, Astrologie, Kabbala usw. (Hasenfratz 1992:225–226)

As a result, the adaptation of religions can be characterised as follows: Religions are adapted to their specific niche, but this does not mean that religions exploit all possibilities. Obviously several niches remain unoccupied until a competing religion succeeds in occupying that niche (Mayr 1988:135–136). Adaptation also does not mean a perfect adjustment to the given environment, because religions as well as species are the result of several consecutive developmental steps. The sum of religious expressions and symbolisations came into existence as the result of historical development with several specific steps of adaptation. The survivals of the many adaptive steps are tolerated by selection, but sometimes they hardly match the spiritual needs of the present religious community.

The origin of religions

New religions come into existence if significant modifications of the natural, economical, political and social environment release an increased and directed variability of the religion in question. In the case of ancient Judaism, political pressure led to increasing variation and promoted the appearance of several reform movements. Only few survived, and ultimately only Christianity and rabbinic Judaism were successful on the market of religious offers.

The reason for the increased variability of early Indian religion during the 6th century bc probably originates in the religion itself. As the German scholar Helmuth von Glasenapp has pointed out, the old Brahmanic religion had focussed mainly on rituals and thus neglected the religious needs of many devotees (Glasenapp 1926:84). On the other hand this development encouraged religious speculation on the spiritual meaning of sacrificial and other rites, which led to aspirations to religious knowledge. As a result, various new religions came into

existence (*ibid.*). In the case of the Indo-European religions, the migration of the different peoples and tribes led to their isolation and, in consequence, to different developments of their religious traditions (Ström and Biezais 1975:52–56).

The emergence of varieties therefore is due not only to environmental factors, but also to traits of the religion itself. Different religions exhibit significant differences with regard to their tendencies to vary and to form new religions. While Christianity and Islam frequently formed new religious communities, as the many schisms in their history show, the old and successful family of the Indo-European religions recently shows few reformatory tendencies (Lanczkowski 1987).

Isolation may determine the emergence of a new religion, but also its extinction. If a variety of a given religion has come into existence, isolation decides whether such a sect will evolve into an independent religion. With regard to the origin of religions, isolating mechanisms are: 1) geographical isolation, 2) cultural isolation, and 3) isolation through the use of different languages.

The religions of the Kafirs in Central Asia may serve as an example for geographical isolation. The geographical location of the settlements of small tribes and peoples in the isolated valleys of the Hindu Kush allowed the survival of their traditional religions of Indo-European origin in a hostile, Islamic environment (Jettmar 1975:37–173). Cultural isolation and isolation through the use of a different language is the reason for the survival of the religion of the Yezidi. During the last decades, however, the Yezidi religion has come under pressure. From an ethnological point of view, the Yezidi belong to the Kurds, who are mostly followers of the religion of Islam today. Since the Kurdish language as a written language is forbidden in modern Turkey, isolation through the use of a different language is only partially effective. Today the Yezidi religion survives in its original geographic area only because of its restricted social organisation, which is linked to the Yezidi religion (Guest 1993). In the meantime the expulsion of the Yezidi from their native country has led to their dispersion. The cultural isolation, which guaranteed the survival of this ancient religion till today, combined with dispersed distribution and the small

number of followers will now probably lead to the extinction of the religion, especially because traits of the religion itself like endogamy and restricted membership hinder any form of expansion.

Distribution of religious information (heredity)

The mechanisms of the distribution of cultural information have recently been investigated by the geneticist Luigi Cavalli-Sforza. Different cultures and, consequently, also religions, expand by means of communication. As Cavalli-Sforza emphasises, the evolution of culture is bound to the same mechanisms as biological evolution. Whereas the genome is transmitted by means of reduplication from generation to generation, cultural evolution is transmitted from the brain of one individual to the next. With regard to religions, intentional and unintentional differences lead to the emergence of varieties. While genetic variation is restricted to mutation and recombination and consequently is a product of mere chance, cultural mutation may be intentional (Cavalli-Sforza 1999:188–190). Information and learning by means of communication is how information about a religion is transmitted. Religious thought and tradition are mainly learned by imitation. As Cavalli-Sforza points out, the religious ideas and practices of a mother and her child are wont to resemble each other even in detail (*ibid.* 206). The way religious ideas and tradition are transmitted hardly differs from biological heredity with regard to variability and promptness. Cultural information, however, is not only transmitted from one generation to the next, but also among members of the same generation (*ibid.* 201). This kind of transmission influences the dynamics of information transmission. Several factors such as the age of the transmitting person, his personality, and his authority are responsible for the success of the transmission. Besides environmental factors, the way in which the information is transmitted, therefore determines the variability or, on the contrary, the conservatism of a religion. If information is mainly transmitted from mother to child, conservative tendencies within a given religion will be most probably strengthened. In contrast, in modern societies the many possibilities of communication allow almost unlimited information. In this regard books and mass media play

a significant role in the communication process, as do migration and tourism. Simultaneously, former mechanisms of isolation recede into the background.

In this respect, the breakdown of isolating mechanisms may lead to a process which is known as hybridisation in biology: If two subspecies do not diverge too much, the breakdown of isolation will lead to interbreeding. The same is true for religions. If mechanisms of isolation disappear, for example political or geographical isolation, closely related and probably even non-related religions may converge and finally fuse.

Even if genetic heredity and the transmission of religious tradition bear strong similarities, the processes are by no means identical. In the realm of organisms the transmission of information is the result of sexual reproduction which is bound to genetic processes. The basic material units of heredity, the genes, are located in the chromosomes. A gene is understood as existing in alternative forms or alleles, which may show a dominant-subordinate relationship when coupled in diploid organisms. Most traits are effected by multiple genes, and most genes affect more than one trait. When sperm and egg fuse at fertilisation, genetic information is transmitted by means of chromosomal crossing-over, which results in a recombination of the various genes. As a result, the variations within a population are mainly due to the many possibilities of recombination of the parental genetic material. As genes are integrated in a gene complex, natural selection usually weeds out disruptive changes, called mutations, and only occasionally allows them to be accommodated (Dobzhansky 1939:28). The transmission of religious information, on the other hand, is not bound to biochemical laws. Neither does a recombination of different units of information take place, nor is there a selection of disruptive changes. That means that with regard to the transmission of religious information units everything is possible: the identical transmission of religious information as well as extensive modifications. Thus the distribution of religious information is a process which is open to irregularity in a way which is not possible in the biological transmission of information. As Cavalli-Sforza shows, there are nevertheless several rules

which control the distribution of religious information and the variability of a religion, although these rules do not operate on a genetic or biochemical level, but on that of behaviour. Not everything possible will actually occur.

According to Cavalli-Sforza religious behaviour usually is transmitted from parents to children. As a result, religions rarely undergo distinct modifications under stable environmental conditions. Only if the religious, natural, economical, social, or political environment changes, do religions tend to vary. Only then the difference between biological and religious heredity becomes an issue. Religions are able to react directly to environmental modifications. Transmission of information by means of communication is faster and more effective compared to the slow and accidental transmission of traits in biology.

6. *Results and conclusion*

Why develop a theory of religious evolution? The history of religions as well as the history of biological systematics provide an answer. The search for a natural order able to classify the material emerged in biology when the number of known species increased to a point where even specialists failed to obtain a general view. Naturalists were forced to look for new systems of classification that would allow them to integrate the material. As a result, biological knowledge increased, especially after Linné's classification had made biological knowledge accessible. A similar situation is found in the history of religions. When non-Christian religions first came to the centre of interest in European research, their number was still so small that a classification would have been useless: Judaism and Islam were competing religions leading to new reflections about the traditional position of Christian belief; the religions of the Indian peninsula and of the ancient cultures around the Mediterranean were interesting topics for philological and philosophical research. But when the new sciences of ethnology and anthropology began to focus on the belief-systems of the so-called savages, the mass of non-Christian religions could no longer be understood in terms of monotheism, polytheism or paganism. As a result, several theories of religious evolution emerged in the

eighteenth and twentieth centuries. As the famous German biologist August Weismann has observed, the development of a new theoretical framework for research is inevitable from time to time:

Es war Zeit geworden, die Einzelheiten wieder einmal zu verarbeiten und zusammenzufassen, damit sie uns nicht über den Kopf wachsen als ein unzusammenhängendes Chaos, in dem niemand sich mehr zurecht fand, weil es niemand mehr übersehen und beherrschen konnte, mit einem Wort: Es war Zeit, daß man sich wieder den allgemeinen Fragen zuwandte. (Weisman 1913:23)

According to Weismann scientific progress is not identical with the sum of isolated facts, because facts adequate for science have to be constructed with regard to the knowledge they presuppose. As the example of biological theory shows, much biological research and inquiry was possible only after Darwin's and Wallace's evolutionary explanation of the origin of species (Weisman 1909:20). Only a theoretical framework allows purposeful research (cf. Chalmers 1999:58).

The state of research in recent archaeology makes it clear that the absence of a theoretical framework often leads to difficulties with regard to the interpretation of the excavations (Talalay 1993:39–40). The reconstruction of the world-view of prehistoric societies must resort to mere speculation. Any type of pagan religion has been ascribed to the peoples of the stone age. The different interpretations were no doubt mutually exclusive, but the validity of one approach over the others could hardly be proven.⁶ Until now the different attempts to reconstruct the religion of prehistoric societies have been based neither on a theory of religious evolution, nor is a methodological framework for such a reconstruction available. But it is not only the possible reconstruction of religions of non-literate societies of the past that leads to difficulties, also the multitude of more recent religions has not yet been described from a classificatory point of view up to now. The many religions of historical and more recent times, including Bellah's classical religions, and primal religions, have not allowed a convincing classification, although the lack of a theoretical framework has been

⁶ The current theoretical framework of archaeology is discussed in Hodder 2001.

frequently recognised and has led to several attempts at classification, including the evolutionary theories and typologies mentioned above.

A theory of the origin and development of the various religions serves the purpose of arranging the material in natural order with regard to its historical (phylogenetic) connections. In consequence, such a theory also has an explanatory function, as far as the relations between the religions are concerned. The theory of religious evolution, as outlined in this paper, describes the distribution of the various religions from a geographical and historical point of view. Religions are related to each other. The dynamics of their distribution is interpreted. In this way the theory of religious evolution has an explanatory function: The manner and direction of development can be not only described, but also explained. Simultaneously, the development of any religion is to be seen in its correlation with its environment. Environmental change will result in the modification of the religion. As a result, the correlation between society and the related religion can be described more specifically as well with the help of an evolutionary theory, than with the old typologies. Even if definite prediction of the future development of a religion under question is not conceivable, the projection of trends is possible.

A theory such as has been outlined in this paper demands a different treatment of religions with regard to their systematic, which means mainly the identification of traits of taxonomic relevance. A new classification of the many religions with regard to their evolutionary relatedness will lead to a new assessment of religions. Primal religions, or, as Bellah calls them, primitive religions, cannot be seen as simply undeveloped. On the contrary, they too are the last in a line of historical development and are thus proved to be successful compared to others. From this point of view some of the traditional West-African religions are of great interest. They have turned out to be the mother-religions of several attractive new religions in Middle and South America. In biological terms, they are actually in the stage of successful reproduction.

But not only prehistoric or primal religions may thus be seen from a new point of view. Questions concerning the religious developments

in modern societies are affected by an evolutionary theory as well. Bellah's "modern religions" no longer exist. Religion as a private matter, originating in a multiplex worldview with several possibilities of religious symbolisation, can no longer be seen as an independent type of religion. If the member of a modern and highly industrialised society decides to prefer religious symbolisations belonging to a different religion, for instance from the Far East, he or she takes advantage of the new possibilities of communication which enable foreign religions to transmit information on a different basis. As a result, foreign religions are able to compete even in societies with different traditions. They manage to distribute and are successful as a religious taxon.

Consequently, the composition of religions in a given society may undergo modifications, but not necessarily the religions themselves. Similarly the emergence of so-called "new religions" can be observed. Up to now they have been described as sects that can hardly claim the taxonomical rank of an independent religion. The emergence of these new religious movements is due to environmental changes in many geographical areas of the world. New modes of communication lead to a decrease in isolating factors and similarly to a decrease in selective forces. The result is the emergence of a large variety of traditional religions that have to compete on the same market of religious offers.

I conclude with some remarks. This article is intended to be a contribution to a theoretical framework for the history of religions. While religious evolution until now has been understood as a process of progress, I have focussed on the biological Theory of Evolution as exemplified by great evolutionists such as Ernst Mayr in order to direct the attention to the main characteristics of natural evolutionary processes. In biology, the Theory of Evolution is accepted. By drawing parallels between biological and religious evolution this article has explored the implications of a correct understanding of this theory for the history religions.

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“SCIENCE” VS. “RELIGION” IN CLASSICAL AYURVEDA¹

STEVEN ENGLER

Summary

This paper evaluates claims that classical Ayurveda was scientific, in a modern western sense, and that the many religious and magical elements found in the texts were all either stale Vedic remnants or later brahminic impositions. It argues (1) that Ayurveda did not manifest standard criteria of “science” (e.g., materialism, empirical observation, experimentation, falsification, quantification, or a developed conception of proof) and (2) that Vedic aspects of the classical texts are too central to be considered inauthentic or marginal. These points suggest that attempting to apply the modern western categories of “science” and “religion” to ancient South Asian medical texts at best obscures more important issues and, at worst, imports inappropriate orientalist assumptions. Having set aside the distraction of “science” vs. “religion” in classical Ayurveda, the paper finds support for claims that brahminic elements were later additions to the texts. It concludes by arguing that this is best explained not in terms of a conceptual tension between religion and science but in terms of social and economic tensions between physicians and brahmins.

The status of science in non-western cultures is a small but growing sub-field of the study of relations between science and religion (Peterson 2000:19; cf. Harding 1998; Selin 1997; Goonatilake 1992). This raises questions regarding the scope and value of the terms “science” and “religion” as used in historical and cross-cultural studies. Ayurveda, the ancient South Asian medical tradition, provides a useful case study. This paper examines a variety of claims that Ayurveda was truly empirical, rational, or scientific and that elements of religion and magic in the texts were minor, non-essential, or inauthentic. Evaluat-

¹ I am indebted to Michael Hawley, Gustavo Benavides, and *Numen*’s anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on previous drafts and to Shrivinas Tilak and Leslie Orr for recommending a number of relevant works.

ing these claims will contribute to a broader framework within which issues of non-western science and religion can be discussed.

Several scholars argue that Ayurveda was scientific and that the many religious and magical elements found in the texts were either stale Vedic remnants or later brahminic impositions that sought to repress Ayurveda’s revolutionary empiricism: “In a tradition dominated by the pundits, Ayurveda . . . represent[s] the seeds of secular thought. True, this secularism is almost immediately repressed, normalized, impregnated with a religious vocabulary” (Zimmermann 1987:212). Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya argues that “In ancient India, the only discipline that promises to be fully secular and contains clear potentials of the modern understanding of natural science is medicine”; and he claims that the “magico-religious” aspects of the texts are “alien elements” and “later grafts” (1977:2–4; cf. 1986:30–35). G. Jan Meulenbeld suggests that brahminic domination is the reason that Ayurveda was unable to pursue its empirical course of modifying theories in the light of observed anomalies (1987:4–5). For Kenneth Zysk, remnants of magical elements attest to Ayurveda’s Vedic origins, and a veneer of brahminic elements attest to the “hinduization process” that brought it into the fold of orthodoxy (1991:118). According to these views, the classical texts consist of distinct layers: authentic Ayurveda — empirical, rational, and scientific — and one or more inauthentic and ill-fitting religious strata.

Several characteristics of science play a role in these claims: (1) *reductive materialism* in the characterization of health and disease, the make-up of the human body, and the function of medicinal substances; (2) the role of *empirical observation and inference* in diagnostic practice and as a factor in theory modification; (3) *theoretical rationality* as indicated both by a formal conceptualization of anomalies and by a non-deterministic view of action (situating empirical therapeutics within a more open sense of “karma”); and (4) evidence of rudimentary *professionalization* among ayurvedic physicians.

Religion, as the Other of these arguments, refers both to Vedic tradition, which predates Ayurveda, and Brahminism, which was under-

going important changes as Ayurveda developed.² The religion of the brahmins shifted over a period of centuries from an exclusive emphasis on conducting Vedic sacrifices to include supervision of new devotional rituals, often in the temples that emerged in the early medieval period (Wolpert 1989:37–87). These two related religious traditions are characterized to a large extent by normative ideas, practices, and social structures as set out in two sets of scriptures: (1) the *Vedas*, dating from well before the development of Ayurveda, which include a vibrant polytheism, an emphasis on rituals to maintain the natural and social order, the correlated high status of the priestly (brahminic) caste, religio-magical protections from harm and diseases (e.g., spells and amulets), astrology, and a complex symbolism linking food, cooking, divinity, ritual and salvation; and (2) the *Upanishads* (elaborated slightly earlier than the ayurvedic texts), which developed the concepts of reincarnation, karma (the positive or negative causal influence of previous actions, including those from past lives), and *moksha* (salvation by liberation from the karmic cycle of rebirth and redeath). Elements of all these religious views are present in the classical ayurvedic texts.

This paper challenges the way these issues have been framed. The first section of the paper offers a brief overview of Ayurveda, and the second section considers claims that the tradition was scientific and finds these claims to be untenable. The weaker claim that Ayurveda had certain empirical characteristics is well supported. The third section of the paper looks at the place of religion in Ayurveda, finding that Vedic religious elements are too central to be excluded, but that brahminic elements may well be later impositions. Hence, the frequent claim that Ayurveda was science in *categorical opposition* to religion is misdirected. The opposition was not between science and religion, but between two traditions: an ancient medical tradition, with its Vedic elements and empirical tendencies, and a certain type of religion, brahminism. The fourth section of the paper considers the implications of

² We must be wary of assuming that “Hinduism” refers to one unified religious tradition (Sontheimer and Kulke 1989; cf. Brockington 1981).

the fact that a modern opposition between the categories of science and religion has been imposed on these ancient medical texts. The recent academic search for a truly scientific (hence, non-religious) core in Ayurveda is suspiciously similar to the privileging of “modern science” over “traditional religion” in orientalist discourses. This leads us to question the use of these categories not as descriptors of abstract belief systems — distinguished by their degree of resemblance to modern thought — but as strategic levers in ideological struggles. Historical and comparative studies suggest that “magic” often functions as a means of isolating an illegitimate realm from the legitimate realm of “religion” (Benavides 1997). I suggest that the terms “science” and “religion,” as used in discussions of classical Ayurveda, highlight competing positions in just such a social and material struggle for legitimacy. That is, the claim that Ayurveda was “science” (notwithstanding its essentially religious elements) characterizes its *historical competition* with a specific sort of religion. The modern academic use of these terms directs our gaze to ideological and material issues not to a free-floating distinction between rationality and superstition. Following this line of thought, the final section of the paper redraws the lines of tension found within the two main ayurvedic texts: from tension between religion and science to that between ayurvedic physicians and brahminic priests.

A Brief Overview of Ayurveda

Ayurveda is the *veda* (knowledge) of *ayus* (life or longevity). As practiced in modern India, the tradition has changed substantially from its classical roots, incorporating elements of Islamic, western, and folk medicine (Leslie 1976; cf. Gangadharan 1990; Filliozat 1990). The Indian government, under the Bharatiya Janata Party, is currently promoting Ayurveda, with substantial budgetary support, as part of its program of encouraging *swadeshi*, indigenous systems (Kumar 2000). As now practiced in the West, Ayurveda incorporates many characteristics of individualistic self-help spiritualities (e.g., Tirtha 1998; Frawley 1999). Zysk refers to the latter development, which has occurred primarily in North America over the last decade and a half, as

“New Age Ayurveda” (2001). In this paper, “Ayurveda” refers solely to the classical medical tradition as set out in the ancient Sanskrit texts.

The primary texts of classical Ayurveda are the *Caraka Samhita* and the *Susruta Samhita*.³ The earliest strata of both texts date most likely from just before the Common Era, though it seems likely that both works, if not compilations in their entirety, were at least substantially reworked as late as the ninth or tenth centuries (Wujastyk 2003:3–4, 63–64; cf. Meulenbeld 1999:114, 130–141, 341–344; Zysk 1991:33; Weiss 1980:94, 103; Hoernle 1982 [1909]). *Caraka* pays more explicit attention to theory. *Susruta* is primarily a surgical text, with its well-known and influential chapters on types and uses of surgical implements (*Susruta*, Su. 7–9). Both texts mention the importance of the *Atharva-Veda* to Ayurveda: for example, brahmins versed in that Veda are to be present at childbirth (*Caraka*, Sa. 8.34; cf. In. 12.80), and mantras from it are to be recited before all meals in order to detoxify food (*Susruta*, Su. 46.141).

Yet Ayurveda introduces a unique focus on the physical body and its processes, with an emphasis on observation and on the importance of grounded theoretical principles for successful therapeutics. On the one hand, we might expect a medical tradition from any culture to be relatively well grounded in observation and experience. On the

³ Except where noted, translations of *Caraka* are from the version of Ram Karan Sharma and Vaidya Bhagwan (1976–94) and those of *Susruta* are from the version of Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna (1991). Priyavrat Sharma’s translation of *Caraka* (Sharma 1994) and *Susruta* (Sharma 1999), and Dominik Wujastyk’s selective translations of ayurvedic works (Wujastyk 2003) were also consulted. References to *Caraka* and *Susruta* are by book, chapter, and verse. The eight books of *Caraka* are Sutrasthanam (abbreviated as “Su”), Vimanasthanam (Vi), Nidanasthanam (Ni), Sarirasthanam (Sa), Indriyasthanam (In), Cikitsasthanam (Ci), Kalpasthanam (Ka), and Siddhasthanam (Si). The six books of *Susruta* are Sutrasthanam (Su), Nidanasthanam (Ni), Sarirasthanam (Sa), Cikitsasthanam (Ci), Kalpasthanam (Ka), and Uttara-Tantra (Ut). For an overview of the wider range of classical ayurvedic literature see Jaggi 1973. For detailed summaries and discussions of historiographic issues see G. Jan Meulenbeld’s magisterial five-volume *History of Indian Medical Literature* (1999–2002).

other hand, according to those who see the tradition as scientific, the ayurvedic physicians developed something uniquely empirical and rational among ancient systems of thought: “Discarding scripture-orientation, they insist on the supreme importance of direct observation of natural phenomena and on the technique of rational processing of the empirical data. . . .” (Chattopadhyaya 1977:7). It is in this attempt to go beyond describing therapeutics to explaining health and disease that Ayurveda stands out.

Ayurvedic physicians are to seek the happiness of their patients, which involves primarily the prevention and cure of disease. However, wealth, happiness in the next life, and *moksa* (salvation) are frequently mentioned as secondary goals. Diseases are caused primarily by the inappropriate use of the mind and senses, though the immediate bodily manifestations of disease are explained in terms of material processes and entities. Proper use of mind and senses depends on the constitution of the individual, the time of the year, and ethical factors. Diseases are also caused by gods, demons, and patients’ actions in their past lives. Karma only partially determines an individual’s mental and physical constitution and causes disease only to a limited extent. As a result, healthy living and therapeutic actions can affect health in this life, despite karmic influences.

In treating disease, ayurvedic physicians seek to maintain the equilibrium of various physical components of the human body: the *dhatu*s (tissue elements), *rasa* (chyle, plasma), blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen. Magical cures, involving amulets and mantras, are recommended in certain cases, but the primary therapeutic focus is materialistic. The primary ayurvedic therapies are drugs, diet, emesis, purgation, and enemas. The common material basis of food and the body are central to all ayurvedic therapies. Food is “cooked” in the body and reduced to a component that nourishes the seven tissue elements, each in turn, and a waste component that nourishes the impurities of the body, the *malas*. The *malas* include bodily emissions and, most importantly, the three *dosas* (humours): *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. So long as the *dosas* remain in proper balance for each individual, they present no problem.

Disequilibrium of the three *dosas*, however, is the primary cause of disease and is the main focus of ayurvedic medical treatment.

Ayurveda as Science

Recent claims that Ayurveda was scientific are explicit that “science” is to be taken here in terms of “the modern understanding of natural science” (Chattopadhyaya 1977:2; cf. Zimmermann 1987:212; Meulenbeld 1987:4–5). This section considers several ways in which Ayurveda might appear, at first sight, to be scientific in this narrow sense: materialism, empirical observation, experimentation, falsification of theories, quantification, a developed conception of proof, and two specific logical concepts (*prabhava* and *yukti*). The purpose of this section is to measure Ayurveda by this modern western definition of science, in order to evaluate claims that it does, in fact, meet this definition. A close reading of the texts leads to the conclusion that Ayurveda was not properly scientific according to these criteria, though it was empirical, i.e., observation-based, in more general ways that would seem to apply to any medical tradition.

Many aspects of Ayurveda are materialistic. A wide variety of medicinal substances are held to bring about the equilibrium of the components of the body. Observation of physical symptoms (e.g., pain, complexion, strength, appetite, sleep, digestion — *Caraka*, Vi. 8.89) is central to correct diagnosis and treatment. In addition, the physical environment is held to play an important role in health, disease, and the efficacy of medicinal substances (e.g., *Caraka*, Vi. 3.7–8). The concept of time also reflects attentive observation of material phenomena (i.e., a broadly empirical stance). For example, time is an important factor in the constitution of the embryo (*Caraka*, Vi. 8.95, Sa. 2.29). In addition, attentiveness to the seasons and to the temporal progression of diseases is a crucial factor in the administration of therapy (*Caraka*, Su. 11.46, 13.18–19, 25.45–47, 26.13, Vi. 8.125–128).

Yet, *Caraka* is explicit that this materialistic dimension is only one approach to medical treatment:

[Therapies] are of two types, viz. spiritual and rational. Spiritual therapy comprises incantation, talisman, jewels, auspicious rites, religious sacrifices, obla-

tions, religious rites, vow, atonement, fasting, chanting of auspicious hymns, paying obeisance, pilgrimage, etc. Elimination as well as alleviation therapies and such other regimens, effects of which can be directly perceived, belong to the category of Rational Therapy. Depending upon the nature of their composition, they are also of two types, viz. those having material substrata [e.g., medicinal substances] and those without having any material substrata [e.g., massage, physical restraint, or frightening the patient]. (*Caraka* Vi. 8.87; cf. *Su.* 30.28)

This sort of reference to religious therapies is exactly the sort of passage that is held to be a later imposition (or earlier survival) by those who argue that Ayurveda is scientific. Yet merely the presence of materialistic elements does not make Ayurveda scientific.

The above list of material phenomena to be observed underlines the centrality of empirical observation in Ayurveda. But, again this is not sufficient to make it science. For example, observation is used to draw non-material conclusions: *Caraka* holds, for example, that an observable “twinkling of the eye” is evidence for the existence of the Absolute Soul (*Sa.* 1.70). *Caraka* goes so far as to label as “heterodox” the view that sensory perception is the only path to valid knowledge, insisting on “other sources of knowledge, viz., scriptural testimony, inference and reasoning”; moreover, *Caraka* insists that “it is not correct to say that only things which can be directly perceived exist, and others do not” (*Su.* 11.8).⁴

Ayurveda’s emphasis on observation as a source of knowledge is not sufficient to support the claim that it was scientific. To be considered empirical in a scientific sense, a system of thought must do more than simply link knowledge claims to observable phenomena; it must do so in certain ways. To support the strong claim that Ayurveda was science, we would need to demonstrate that ayurvedic knowledge was arrived at or extended through processes of experimental verification or falsification. We would need to ask whether the medical concepts were accepted, modified or rejected on the basis of observation or

⁴ Sharma 1994 translates, “Hence it is illogical to say that only perception is there and nothing else.”

experimentation. An empirical relation between data and practice is very different from one between data and theory.⁵

There is no evidence of experimentation as a means of verifying/falsifying theories in classical Ayurveda. Zimmerman finds “No examination, no research, no enquiry or attempt to find a reason for the data. . .” (1987:158). Of course, the texts do encourage certain sorts of observation. Students of Ayurveda are instructed to learn anatomy from “direct personal observation” of “all the various different organs, external and internal” of a human corpse that has soaked in water for a week (*Susruta*, Sa. 5.50–56). Practical knowledge is also grounded in direct experience: students are to practice surgical techniques on gourds and dead animals (*Susruta*, Su. 9.1–3). More intriguingly, the texts give occasional instructions for empirical tests to determine the specific nature of substances:

The test in the case of Gangam rain water consists on exposing to it, for [48 minutes], a quantity of undiscoloured Shali rice in a silver bowl. . . . Gangetic rain water should be ascertained from the fact of the aforesaid Shali rice not being in any way affected in its colour. (*Susruta*, Su. 45.3)

Although such examples reinforce the claim that Ayurveda is empirical in a weak sense, they do not indicate a properly scientific relation between theory and data.

Quantification is often considered a key characteristic of scientific reasoning and method as manifested in ancient medical systems (Lloyd 1986:257). The classical Ayurvedic texts show some limited evidence of this, but not enough to qualify as properly scientific. The ayurvedic texts also attend closely to time, with an emphasis on astrological timing, and attentiveness to the seasons, the duration of alterations in diet during periods of therapy, and cycles of human life and reproductive processes. They specify appropriate dosages of medicinal substances. All these factors again underline the importance of observation. These examples, however, do not “go far beyond the range of what could be

⁵ For an overview of positivistic views of science and of epistemological and cultural critiques see Hacking 1983, Giere 1998, and Sardar 2000.

justified fairly straightforwardly by appeals to readily accessible evidence”; they do not even attempt the “spurious quantification and ad hoc numerological elaboration” that G.E.R. Lloyd finds in some Hippocratic texts (1986:257). In other words, we find an instantiation of *sankhya* (enumeration), a notion important in Indian thought, and we find enumeration linked in a very general way with observation; but we do not find the connections between quantification, experimentation, and theory generation that are hallmarks of modern western science. Once again, claims that Ayurveda was, in fact, scientific in this narrow sense are not supported.

A rigorous conception of proof is another criterion of science that is not clearly instantiated in the classical Ayurvedic texts. The path by which ayurvedic knowledge was generated and established is unclear. We can neither credit nor discount a claim that this knowledge was proven empirically. Despite claims to the contrary, Vedic ritual appears not to have manifested an explicit notion of proof (Lloyd 1990:98–104). The ayurvedic texts emphasize authority and tradition, rather than proof and empirical evidence, as sources of legitimacy for medical knowledge (*Caraka*, Vi. 8.13–14).

Nor is there any appeal to any conception of proof in the rules for debate between physicians (*Caraka*, Vi. 8.15–28). Emphasis is placed almost exclusively on the personal qualities of participants. The text sets out normative standards for supporting substantive positions taken by practitioners within the discipline, and issues of proof do not receive even a superficial nod. Argument is rhetorical not empirical. This neglect of empirical evidence supports the view that Ayurveda’s empirical characteristics were neither logically nor practically fundamental in a manner analogous to modern science. It is not surprising that Ayurveda involved different criteria for authority than does modern western science. However, this difference is one more counter-argument to claims that it was scientific in this narrow sense.

Two other arguments that Ayurveda was scientific point to its conceptual apparatus. First, a set of four concepts (*rasa*, *vipaka*, *virya* and *prabhava*) deals with pharmacological anomalies (*Caraka*, Su. 26.53–79; Sharma 1994:184–187; cf. *Susruta*, Su. 40). That is, these

concepts appear at first sight to represent theory modification in the light of empirical observation. Second, the concept of *yukti* represents a form of empirically based inference uniquely defined by *Caraka* (Su. 11.21–25; cf. Dasgupta 1932:376n1). A closer examination of these concepts will show that, although they are clearly empirical in a limited sense, they are not scientific as Chattopadhyaya (1977:7, 9, 175–179, 207, 314ff., 390) and Larson (1987:250–51) suggest.

Ayurveda has a well-developed set of logical concepts and categories, reflecting its emphasis on causal analysis. It explains the effects of medicinal substances in terms of putatively material substances and processes using an equilibrium model of health. Ayurvedic theory draws on philosophical concepts from other ancient schools of thought.⁶ However, it displays several unique characteristics. The logical examples found in the *Caraka* are almost entirely of a medical nature, suggesting that they are integral to Ayurveda rather than grafted on (Dasgupta 1932:402). In addition, *Caraka* mentions but does not use terms for “cause” drawn from different traditions, indicating a reliance on its own tradition of causal analysis (Dasgupta 1932:395).

Medicinal substances are categorized at the most general level according to their *rasa*, taste (*Caraka*, Su. 26.53–79; cf. *Susruta*, Su. 40).⁷ Substances with specific combinations of *rasa* are held to act in specific ways upon the *dosas*. A physician infers a specific imbalance of the *dosas* from the patient’s constitution, symptoms, habitat, and the time of year. He then prescribes a specific diet or medicine that is

⁶Dasgupta argues (intriguingly but not conclusively) that the influential Nyaya system of logic has its roots in Ayurveda (1932:395–402; cf. Chattopadhyaya 1986:33). Chattopadhyaya extends this claim, somewhat less plausibly, in arguing that the Vaisesika categories so central to Ayurveda originated in the medical schools as well (Chattopadhyaya 1977:142, 426). Hendrik Kern argued in 1896 that the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism have their roots in *Caraka*; a number of scholars have echoed his view, though more recent work discounts the claim (Zysk 1991:38; cf. Zimmer 1948:33 and 196n5). G. Jan Meulenbeld offers a useful summary of the secondary literature on these and related issues (1999:109–114, 336–345).

⁷This more general theoretical use of *rasa* (one of the Vaisesika qualities of matter) should be distinguished from the name for the first of the *dhatus*.

chosen with regard to its *rasa*, so as to counteract the imbalance of the *dosas*.

The ayurvedic physicians recognized, however, that some substances did not have the effect they should have, given their *rasa*. That is, they recognized that their most basic concept of pharmacological categorization did not always reflect empirical facts. This seems a type of trial and error methodology but is not in itself scientific. Where the medicinal action of a substance did not agree with its *rasa*, the discrepancy was accounted for with the second-level concept of *vipaka* (post-digestive taste). That is, the action of the substance was still a result of “taste,” but of a taste that resulted from changes to the substance in the human body. *Caraka* and *Susruta* disagree over the *vipaka* of certain substances, which suggests that the inference of a substance’s *vipaka* from its medicinal effects was somewhat problematic (Meulenbeld 1987:10). The physicians recognized further that sometimes substances with the same *rasa* and the same *vipaka* still differed in their effects. This was accounted for with the third-level concept of *virya* (potency). In the case that two substances had the same *rasa*, *vipaka* and *virya* and still differed in their effects, this was accounted for with the fourth-level concept of *prabhava* (specific action).

This repeated invocation of higher-level concepts to explain anomalies is *ad hoc*. In its broader sense, the fourth-level concept, *prabhava* refers to a power, generally seen as inaccessible to reason, which is manifested in the effects of *rasa*, *vipaka* and *virya*. In its narrower sense, *prabhava* refers to a power, not accessible to reason, that a given substance has by virtue of its *svabhava* (nature) (Meulenbeld 1987:14). *Svabhava*, inherent nature, is the reason that each substance has the qualities or properties that it has: each substance is what it is just because it is that way. Chattopadhyaya translates *svabhava* as “laws of nature” and argues that the concept demonstrates the scientific nature of Ayurveda (Chattopadhyaya 1977:9, 175–179). This is misleading, given that *svabhava* is a quiddity beyond the reach of reason: the ultimate explanation for the behaviour of specific substances is that it is their nature to behave this way. Filliozat argues that Ayurveda is *not* empirical on these very grounds: this chain of concepts is “a dogma-

tism which interprets experience” not a theory responsible to empirical evidence (Filliozat 1964:30).

The series of concepts, *rasa*, *vipaka*, *virya* and *prabhava* show that ayurvedic theory recognized pharmacological anomalies but dealt with them, ultimately, by placing them beyond rational explanation. These concepts demonstrate a clear interplay between empirical observation and theory, but one that is stipulative not scientific. When the facts did not fit the theory, the theory was saved by appeal to a concept beyond empirical observation; it was not modified to more accurately reflect the facts. The fact that observations led ultimately not to theory modification but to an appeal to an irrational concept of nature collapses any analogy with modern science (cf. Meulenbeld 1987:4; Filliozat 1964:29–30).

A separate argument for the scientific status of Ayurveda rests on the epistemological concept of *yukti*. According to *Caraka*, there are four means of attaining knowledge: reliable testimony, perception, inference, and *yukti* (Su. 11.21–25; Wujastyk 2003:25; Sharma 1994:72). *Yukti*, as a term for “reason,” has stood in tension with “authoritative tradition” at several points in the history of Indian thought (Halbfass 1988:207, 278–79, 389, 536n16, 541n94). However, as defined in *Caraka*, the concept is unique to Ayurveda: “When from a number of events, circumstances, or observations one comes to regard a particular judgement as probable, it is called *yukti*. . .” (Dasgupta 1932:376n1). *Caraka* says little regarding the definition or application of *yukti*. *Yukti* “perceives things as outcomes of [a] combination of multiple causative factors” (Su. 11.25). As examples, *Caraka* mentions forecasting a harvest from the condition of the seed, ground and weather, reasoning that fire will be produced when two pieces of wood are rubbed together with sufficient vigour, and predicting the efficacy of therapeutic measures based on specific symptoms. Chattopadhyaya argues that *yukti*, which he translates as “rational application,” indicates the scientific nature of Ayurveda (1977:7, 207, 314ff., 390). Gerald Larson echoes this claim when he translates *yukti* as “heuristic reasoning” and claims that “what the medical practitioners are trying to get at with their notion

of *yukti* [is] an empirical and, indeed, experimental scientific (in the modern sense) approach to reality and experience” (1987:250–51).

Although *yukti* is another example of an impressive attentiveness to empirical observation, there are problems with the claim that the concept made Ayurveda scientific. First, the characterization of *yukti* is too sketchy and ambivalent to support such a claim. Second, the most important classical medical commentator, Cakrapani, (as well as the non-medical commentator Santaraksita) and the respected historian of Indian philosophy Surendranath Dasgupta, question the status of *yukti* as a separate means of attaining knowledge: they argue that it is properly subsumed under the more general case of inference (Dasgupta 1932:375). *Caraka* equates the two at a different point (Vi. 4.4). Third, even granted the value of such a conception of causal inference within an empirical medical tradition, there is no reason to see this as a properly scientific characteristic. The concept of *yukti* is another indicator of the medical tradition’s attentiveness to empirical data but not an indicator of a scientific relation between these data and medical theory.

In sum, the strong claim that Ayurveda was scientific fails, though the centrality of empirical observation is obvious. Ayurveda simply does not manifest characteristics of modern science in anything more than a vague analogous sense. To say that ayurvedic physicians were “working scientists” who developed “the scientific method” (Chattopadhyaya 1986:34) or that Ayurveda manifested an “experimental scientific (in the modern sense) approach to reality and experience” (Larson 1987:251) is simply wrong. This is true whether we consider materialism, empiricism, quantification, experimentation, verification and falsification, or theory modification as characteristics of science and scientific method. The claim that Ayurveda was scientific reduces to the claim that it was broadly empirical. Let us turn now to the corollary that it was non-religious.

Religion in Ayurveda

Religious ideas are found throughout the ayurvedic texts. This section considers the place of four of these — the sacred cow, karma,

religious views of the self, and magical cures — and concludes that Vedic elements are too central to be discounted as marginal but that brahminic elements are not so central. We find no categorical opposition between science and religion; rather we will need to look for a more nuanced tension between this empirical medical tradition and certain religious elements. That is, the claim that all religious elements are external to Ayurveda fails, but the possibility remains alive that the texts do reflect historical tensions between physicians and brahmins.

The first dimension of religion in Ayurveda is the prominent place of cows in the texts. The issue here is the extent to which Ayurveda broke with Vedic tradition (where arguments that Ayurveda was truly scientific hold as a corollary that any Vedic, and brahminic, elements were marginal). The secondary literature reveals a spectrum of views, from continuity to discontinuity. Filliozat holds that “Ayurveda is the legitimate heir to the [*Atharva*] Veda, but it has developed to a large extent the patrimony thus received” (1964:188). Dasgupta notes parallels between the concepts of Ayurveda, especially those of the *Caraka*, and the *Atharva-Veda*, and he states, “it may not be unreasonable to suppose that the Atreya school, as represented by Caraka, developed from the *Atharva-Veda*” (Dasgupta 1932:279). He suggests that the *Susruta Samhita* might represent a tradition with a different provenance. Ultimately, though, Dasgupta emphasizes discontinuity between the Vedic and ayurvedic traditions, stressing the uniqueness of *Caraka*’s materialistic view of the causes of disease (1932:301). Chattopadhyaya emphasizes discontinuity, arguing explicitly against Filliozat (Chattopadhyaya 1977:251–269). For Zimmermann, Ayurveda parted ways with the Vedic tradition from which it emerged because it represents a “movement of thought toward . . . concrete and biogeographical realities” (1987:216). Zysk explains the transition from Vedic to Ayurvedic medicine as a Kuhnian paradigm shift, though he notes that the persistence of magico-religious elements jars with such an emphasis on discontinuity (1991:5, 117). However, as Zysk notes, evidence to support the independent development of ayurvedic theory is missing (1991:119).

However, the case of the cow casts important light on this issue. Ayurveda is ambiguous about the cow. Two views stand in obvious tension. On the one hand, cattle products (beef, milk, urine, and dung) are to be taken internally for medicinal purposes (cf. Chattopadhyaya 1977:389).⁸ For example, after giving birth, women should consume a paste made, in part, from “a portion of the right ear of the untamed and alive bull . . . cut and smashed in a stone mortar” (*Caraka*, Sa. 8.41). On the other hand, the cow is to be treated with all the respect due from orthodox brahmins.⁹ How are we to interpret a text that holds that cows are to be both eaten and not harmed?

The apparent contradiction is resolved if we accept that the religious elements are earlier survivals or later impositions (Chattopadhyaya 1977:15, 380–387; cf. Zimmermann 1987:186). On this view, divine proscriptions and bovine prescriptions have no common ground. However, the contrast between religious/orthodox and empirical/medical references to cattle is not as sharp as this argument demands. This is not to deny that some passages may well be later brahminic additions. But the majority of passages discussing the therapeutic use of cows clearly echo Vedic tradition and in a manner that makes intrinsic sense within the conceptual framework of Ayurveda itself. Comparison with Vedic views suggests that reverence for the bovine was part of earlier tradition that Ayurveda developed but did not leave behind.¹⁰

The Vedic idea that all food is “cooked” in the body is axiomatic in classical Ayurveda. In the Vedas, the cow was a potent symbol of the “cooking of the world,” the creative role that sacrifice had in shaping

⁸ See, for example, *Caraka*, Su. 1.68–69, 5.11, 14.25–26, 27.80, 27.218; Vi. 8.136, Sa 8.9; *Susruta*, Su. 45.18ff., 45.81–83, 46.47, 46.115, 46.132; Ci 1.82, 3.44–45, 5.13, 5.34, 9.22–23, 10.15, 11.12, 23.15, 26.20–21.

⁹ See, for example, *Caraka*, Su. 8.18, 25.28; Ni. 7.11; Vi. 8.6, 8.11–13; In. 12.71–80; Ci. 9.94; *Susruta*, Su. 29.12; Ci. 24.78.

¹⁰ Although eating cows was clearly problematic for the orthodox brahmins, this wasn’t necessarily true for the Vedic tradition. There are suggestions in the *Rig Veda* that cows were eaten at least on special occasions such as marriages (Srinivasan 1979:19, 73; cf. Wolpert 1989:28). This reinforces the possibility that, even in allowing consumption of beef, Ayurveda developed in continuity with Vedic tradition.

and maintaining the world and its processes (Zimmermann 1987:207, 220). Ayurveda elaborates this cosmic cooking in order to characterize individuals and their relation to their physical environment (Zimmermann 1987:207). For example, several themes important to both Vedic and ayurvedic texts converge in the relation between the cow and its milk. According to the *Rig Veda*, the cow manifests a fundamental ambiguity because it is raw (needing further preparation to be converted into food) yet it produces a cooked food, milk, which is ready to consume (Srinivasan 1979:51, 119, 135). “Cow” is used in the Vedas as a metaphor for “rays of light,” “rays of dawn,” and “dawn” because of the animal’s bright and light-like milk (Srinivasan 1979:45, 118). This connection between the cow and the sun extends to the sacrificial fire (Srinivasan 1979:52, 120–121). Agni, the god of the sacrificial fire, is frequently referred to as a cow or a bull (Srinivasan 1979:81, 142). In Ayurveda, cow’s milk is an elixir *par excellence* because it has the qualities of the vital fluid, *ojas*, the necessary essence of all bodily constituents (*Caraka*, Su. 27.218, 30.9–14; cf. *Susruta*, Su. 15.25–31; Narayanaswami 1990; Tilak 1989:76). The same term is found in the *Atharva Veda*, where Agni is *ojas* and is asked to give *ojas* to the worshipper (Dasgupta 1932:293). Vedic sacrifice sustained the cosmic and social order, and ayurvedic therapies sustained the fluid equilibrium of the human body.

The claim that ayurvedic passages valuing the cow are inauthentic is untenable, given that the Vedic metaphor of cooking is basic to the conceptual framework of Ayurveda. In this case, the alleged rift between science and religion in the ayurvedic texts threatens to throw out the baby with the bathwater—or cooking with the cow. It is one thing to label certain passages as inauthentic; it is something else to call into question the guiding metaphor of the entire system of thought. There seems to be no reason to discount these passages except the assertion that they are non-empirical: the circularity is obvious.

It might be argued that Ayurveda drew on but radically transformed Vedic ideas, using them either as technical terms for new empirical concepts or as new guiding metaphors to frame these (cf. Goonatilake 1992:222). But this is a truism. The metaphor of cooking necessarily

took on a different significance in the light of the physicians’ experience with the material process of the human body and the effects of diet, climate, and medicinal substances. This is really just to assert that Ayurveda drew on but went beyond its Vedic roots, that the two traditions are both continuous and discontinuous. To say that this ancient medical tradition was both somewhat empirical and reflected religious themes of its times is a far cry from showing it to have been science and not religion. It merely asserts Ayurveda to be what it obviously was, a post-Vedic North Indian medical tradition. It appears necessary to think of layers rather than of one static text, but the boundaries between these layers are not sharply defined.

A second dimension of religion in Ayurveda is the concept of karma. The ayurvedic view of karma is cited both as an example of religious ideas grafted onto rational ones and, contrarily, as an example of the extent to which Ayurveda is rational. Dasgupta argues that the ayurvedic view of karma was uniquely rational in its denial of determinism (Dasgupta 1932:402–403; cf. Weiss 1980). Zysk agrees that it was an authentic element of the medical tradition (1991:30). Chatopadyaya, on the other hand, argues that karma was a later imposition on the text by the “brahminic counter-ideology” (1977:186–189).

Karma in *Caraka* explains both certain causes of disease and the formation of the fetus. In both cases, however, karma is only one factor among several. *Susruta*, in fact, does not mention karma in its section on the etiology of disease (Weiss 1980:93). The ayurvedic view of karma is less deterministic than other South Asian views, allowing that actions in this life can override karmic influences from previous lives: “A weak *daiva* (actions during the previous life) get subdued by a strong *purusakara* (action during the present life). Similarly, a strong *daiva* subdues *purusakara*. . .” (*Caraka*, Vi. 3.33–34).¹¹ This shifted emphasis from one’s behaviour in past lives to one’s behaviour

¹¹ Max Weber’s deterministic and socially conservative view of karma has left a distorted legacy: “. . . the inescapable on-rolling *karma* causality is in harmony with the eternity of the world, of life, and, above all, the caste order” (Weber 1958a:121). Ayurveda is the clearest counter-example to Weber’s overly deterministic view of

in this life (Weiss 1980:110). In addition, physical circumstances and medical therapies can override karmic influences. That is, the physical and mental constitution of the individual is not solely a result of karma: the constitutions and actions of the parents, time of year, and even the diet of the pregnant mother are held to be contributing factors. Both these dimensions of Ayurveda's view of karma make room for the view that diet, medication and the proper use of mind and senses in this life can have an effect on health and disease. Hence, there seems to be no need to argue, as Chattopadhyaya would have it, that karma is a later religious imposition.

Although the ayurvedic concept of karma opens the door for an empirical therapeutics, the concept is used in a way that counts against the claim that Ayurveda was scientific. Karma is used to explain diseases that do not fit the pattern of an imbalance of the *dosas* and cases where the disease is resistant to treatment: "Notwithstanding this success of Ayurveda in assimilating a karma doctrine, from an etic perspective it manifests an abandoning of empirical medical methodology in the face of insurmountable illness" (Weiss 1980:109–110).¹² Karma, like the concepts of *prabhava* and *svabhava* discussed above, is used in an *ad hoc* manner to explain anomalies.

A third dimension of religion in Ayurveda consists of religious views of the self.¹³ Ayurvedic texts focus primarily on the constitution and ailments of the physical body: "The body constitutes the root cause of the well being of the individual. . . . Leaving everything else, one should maintain the body. For if there is no body, there is nothing that can be made available to the individual" (*Caraka*, Ni. 6.6–7). However,

karma (cf. Weiss 1980). For other more nuanced South Asian views of karma see Doniger 1980 and Keyes and Daniel 1983.

¹² E.g., "disorders which are not corresponding to the vitiation of dosas are found to have been caused by the wrath of god etc." (*Caraka*, Sa. 6.27, trans. Sharma 1994).

¹³ It would be misleading, of course, to search for a modern Western sense of "self" in Ayurveda. A number of studies have explored aspects of distinctly different dimensions of self-perception, self-formation, and social agency in modern South Asian cultures (Derné 1995; Roland 1991; Trawick 1990; Daniel 1987; Carrithers *et al.* 1986; Ostor *et al.* 1982; Kakar 1978).

this material, embodied conception of the human self is not the only one found in the classical texts: the religious doctrines of *karma* and rebirth, *moksa*, and union with *Brahman* are present in the texts and offer alternative views. For example, Ayurveda is the science of *ayus* (“life” or “longevity”), but *anubandha* (that which transmigrates from one body to another) is a synonym for *ayus* (*Caraka*, Su. 1.41–42). Once again, discussion centres on whether these other views can be shown to be extraneous.

The human object of medical knowledge and practice is discussed in terms taken largely from the Vaisesika and, to a lesser extent, the Samkhya philosophical schools (e.g., *Caraka*, Sa 1.17, 53). Mind, soul, and body together constitute *Purusa*, the subject matter of Ayurveda (*Caraka*, Su. 1.46–47). *Prakrti* is the source of creation, and the other components of *Purusa* evolve from it under the influence of a disequilibrium of the three fundamental principles (*gunas*): *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (*Caraka*, Sa. 1.67–69; cf. *Samkhya-karika* 25). Even here, in the most material and empirical discussion of the constitution of human beings in *Caraka*, we find a view that is not exclusively so.

In addition to this philosophical view, not widely used in *Caraka*, the text has other less materialistic views. Three are especially relevant. First, *Caraka*’s section on embryology states that the combination of soul, mind and the five fundamental “subtle” elements is that which transmigrates (Sa. 2.31; cf. 2.35–37, 3.1–3, 8, 18). Second, *moksa* (salvation or liberation from the karmic cycle) is repeatedly stated to be a goal of life in *Caraka*. Knowledge of one’s true nature as identical with all the universe is said to lead to union with *Brahman*, and ayurvedic knowledge is included as one of the paths to salvation (*Caraka*, Sa. 5.11–12, Su. 25.40; cf. 1:435). Third, the fetus is said to be a result of two factors: the union of father’s semen and mother’s blood, and the admixture of the *atman* (true self or universal mind) with the subtle body (the immaterial body that transmigrates). The latter is the means whereby the individual’s *karma* affects the fetus. *Atman* is the eternal sustainer of consciousness (*Caraka*, Su. 11.13); but it senses only when in contact with the sense organs, and it knows

only through its constant association with mind (*manas*) (*Caraka*, Su. 1.46–47, Sa. 1.75–76, 3.18–19; cf. Dasgupta 1932:310, 369).

Caraka describes human nature in conflicting ways: as embodied, as transmigrating, and as identical with the universe and *Brahman*. We must ask whether the non-materialistic views are inauthentic additions. These views reflect later brahminic rather than earlier Vedic religious beliefs. Simply noting this fact offers no support for the hypothesis of brahminic intervention in the medical texts. After all, *Caraka* is explicit that different views of human nature are relevant in different contexts, with the material view most important for medicine (Sa. 1.132). The possibility remains, however, that these distinct views of the human person reflect a tension between the ayurvedic physicians and brahminic orthodoxy.

A fourth dimension of religion in Ayurveda is the other of science: magic. The Ayurvedic texts abound with diagnostic and therapeutic claims that seem superstitious or magical. *Caraka*, for example, in addition to its frequent emphasis on empirical observation and materialistic explanation, contains many such passages: to cite just a few, astrological timing is vital throughout (e.g., Ni. 7.14; cf. *Susruta*, Sa. 10.41, Ci. 13.8); clouds that obscure the moon or confused birds indicate an unhealthy region (Vi. 3.7–8); dreams and omens are important signs (e.g., Ni. 7.6, In. 1.3); wearing appropriate jewels is curative (e.g., Ni. 7.16; cf. *Susruta*, Ci. 24.40); ethical actions such as paying respect to crossroads and not stepping on the shadows of kin results in health (Su. 8.18–19); a small statue of a man will help change the sex of a fetus to male (Sa. 8.19; cf. *Susruta*, Sa. 3.15, 10.2). *Susruta* tells us that the use of a certain oil can allow one to live a thousand years (Ci. 6.17; cf. 28.6), that wearing shoes protects one from evil spirits (Ci. 24.47–48), and that the sounds of drums treated with a certain substance “destroy the effects of even the most dreadful poison” (Ka. 3.12). There is no obvious contradiction in claiming that Ayurveda was part empirical and part magical. That is, the presence of these passages are consistent with the claim that Ayurveda was largely empirical in a weak sense, but not with arguments that it was scientific.

The texts themselves seem at times explicitly to acknowledge the value of different approaches that, at first sight, seem as scientific, magical, and religious (or as properly Ayurvedic, Vedic, and brahminic) (Chattopadhyaya 1977:18, 367). *Caraka* holds that the views of different traditions—e.g., medical, ritualistic (Vedic), and spiritual (brahminic)—are appropriate in different circumstances (Vi. 8.54; cf. Su. 25.26–29). It also distinguishes three types of therapy: therapy based on reasoning (“administration of proper diet and medicinal drugs”); spiritual therapy (using mantras, charms, and gems); and psychic therapy (emphasizing “withdrawal of mind from harmful objects”) (Su. 11.55; Wujastyk 2003:33).

Given the complex intermingling of empirical and magical passages and the texts’ explicit acceptance of these tensions, the view that Ayurveda was scientific in a modern sense begs some problematic footwork. One approach would be to assimilate these passages with Vedic tradition, to say that “magical” and “Vedic” are equivalent (cf. Zysk 1991:118). The Vedas, above all the *Atharva Veda*, contain many similar passages. There are two problems with this: it adds to the difficulty of excising these passages as inauthentic by revealing a more pervasive and complex relation to Vedic tradition; and the variety of “magical” elements transcends Vedic models. For example, even in passages where the “rational” nature of the ayurvedic texts is emphasized exclusively, a look at the source text often indicates a striking admixture of magical elements whose origin is not obviously the Vedas (e.g., *Caraka*, Su. 8.18–29; cf. Dasgupta 1932:420–421; Chattopadhyaya 1977:144–145). Another approach would be to suggest that the texts reflected contemporary popular beliefs at these points, rather than the Vedas themselves: the later history of Ayurveda demonstrates the inclusion of such elements (Leslie 1976). However, any attempt to discard “non-science” from the texts would leave us with even more complex strata of non-empirical elements to explain away, yet with insufficient evidence to do so.

A third option would be to argue that many of the magical elements were a best guess empiricism appropriate to the times, formally

empirical but substantively inaccurate (cf. Chattopadhyaya 1977:158, 172–173). For example, *Caraka* tells us that

Ayurveda has eight branches, viz., 1. Internal medicine, 2. Science of diseases specific to supra-clavicular region, viz., eye, ear, nose, mouth, throat, etc., 3. Surgery, 4. Toxicology, 5. Science of demonic seizures (Psychology), 6. Pediatrics, 7. Science of rejuvenation and 8. Science of aphrodisiacs. (Su. 30.28)

Is the “science of demonic seizures” to be taken as science, religion, or magic? Given that modern psychology has lagged behind the physical sciences, we might give the benefit of the doubt to ancient physicians labouring to explain the human mind in empirical terms. Ayurvedic discussions of insanity reflect a curious mixture of empirical aspects — symptoms of insanity caused by an imbalance of the *doshas* or by traumatic events include noises in the ears, spasms, incoherent speech, inappropriate anxiety or outbursts, loss of appetite, and continual anguish — and “magical” or “religious” aspects — certain dreams, “riding undesirable vehicles,” and the desire to injure cows or brahmins are all symptoms of insanity caused by demons, by going to a crossroads alone, by improper scriptural recitation or interpretation, by visiting a sacred tree or temple in an unclean state, or by the influence of inauspicious planets (*Caraka*, Ni. 7.7–14). Arguing that magic and religion fill in the gaps where empirical science has not yet reached would be one approach to maintaining, in principle at least, the line between scientific and “magico-religious” elements of the texts. After all, the former are more prominent in discussions of “endogenous” insanity and the latter of “exogenous.”

However, there are three problems with the attempt to excise “magical” elements by considering them a sort of proto-empiricism. It addresses only a small subset of such elements. It is circular by virtue of too rigid a view of science, taking parts of the text at face value when it suits the argument and discounting others. And, most importantly, it takes for granted that the concepts of science, religion, and magic can be used uncritically in historical and cross-cultural contexts. If we press the ayurvedic texts through a conceptual colander designed to filter out the non-empirical, we can conclude nothing apart from the

fact that this medical tradition, like most, if not all, others, contains some empirical elements.

In sum, the argument that Ayurveda was non-religious fails, as did the argument that it was scientific. The Vedic metaphor of cooking is too central to exclude. Other magical and religious elements are too prominent and explicitly acknowledged simply to explain them away, barring support from a thorough redaction analysis. However, certain elements (e.g., Upanishadic conceptions of the self) are not as central. Here the argument that the texts reflect later brahminic impositions seems at least tenable. Yet the argument that all religious and magical elements are extraneous to Ayurveda proper fails. The line between science and religion simply cannot be drawn through these ancient medical texts as Chattopadhyaya, Zimmermann, Zysk and others suggest. If there is a tension between elements of the text, this is not a categorical opposition between science and religion, but between the general empirical bent and a very specific subset of religious passages. This leads us to ask why so much effort has been expended to apply the inappropriately general categories of science and religion to these texts. Perhaps there is something more here than a simple misapplication of modern western categories.

Ideological Roles of “Science”

The general import of the arguments we have considered is that Ayurveda (1) was historically rooted to some extent in the “magico-religious” Vedic tradition, (2) developed independently as an “empirico-rational” tradition, and (3) was later assimilated by the “orthodox” brahminic tradition. The trajectory is a plateau, up from religion to shine briefly as a beacon of proto-scientific empiricism, then down to religion again. An implicit valuation of science over religion haunts this debate. If “scientific” Ayurveda supposedly *stands out* from its “religious” background, we should question not just the positive evaluation of the former but also the negative evaluation of the latter.

In 1613 Jesuit missionary Roberto Nobili included “Aiur vedam” in his list of the sciences of the brahmins, and he drew an implicitly

ideological line through each of the various *scientiis quas Brahmanes tractant*. (At this time, of course, “science” was a general term for a system of thought.) On the one hand, Nobili sifted his sources for what he considered to be religion, and he found in the concept of Brahman a reference to the “one, true, immaterial God, at least as far as it was possible for him to be known through the natural light of reason” (Halbfass 1988:40). On the other hand, Nobili considered the majority of brahminic teachings, which did not echo his Christian conception of religion, to be “primarily secular, natural wisdom; the role of the Brahmins and their function, as well as their customs and insignia, were mundane and social in nature, not religious; they were ‘wise men,’ not idolators or temple priests” (Halbfass 1988:41). The seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary had a vested interest in finding “religion” at the heart of Hindu “science.”

Is it possible that twentieth-century quests for “science” in Ayurveda reflect a symmetrical concern to find reflections of another dominant Western worldview at the heart of Hinduism? These questions lead us to consider the possibility that attempts to pan scientific gold from religious silt in the ayurvedic texts reflect orientalist assumptions.¹⁴

Three important points emerge here. First, academic writings on India and Hinduism have taken shape in a space of contact between South Asia and the West, in which space the West has had greater power, political and economic, throughout most if not all of the last century and a half when the majority of such academic writings were produced. Second, the concepts of religion and science — along with related terms such as Hinduism and rationality — have been interpreted and defined in a variety of ways in these discourses, and these struggles over the basic terms of debate cannot in good conscience be separated from struggles for economic and political power (cf. Benavides 2001).¹⁵ Third, all sides of these debates are complex, with

¹⁴ On orientalism see Tibawi 1964, Said 1979, Inden 1986.

¹⁵ To define “science” purely in terms of theory, method, data, and their mutual relation (e.g., materialism, reductionism, replication, falsification) neatly sidesteps the question of science’s relation to power. It also fails to capture other important

a spectrum of representations of self and other and with frequent active appropriations of concepts from the other side.

A number of scholars have drawn attention in recent decades to a “tendency to read Indian history in terms of a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into ‘inadequacy’” (Chakrabarty 1992:5). And science is often that which India, or Hinduism, is said to lack: “The Indian mind is . . . [seen as] devoid of ‘higher’, that is, scientific rationality” (Inden 1990:264). Science has played a key role, for example, in (primarily Western) attempts to explain why the West has been progressive and dynamic in contrast to the conservative, static nature of Indian cultures: “People, in this view, take an active role in shaping their society only insofar as they or, more exactly, their leaders, have scientific knowledge of the physical and biological world and its analogue, the social world” (Inden 1986:415).

Indian scholars also drew on this valorization of science. Science came to be sharply opposed to traditional religious, social, and cosmological ideas in North India in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Baber 1996:197; cf. Sangwan 1988:217). The association between science and power was clearly recognized by the emerging western-educated urban elites: the *bhadralok* of Bengal, for example, “sought education in English and Western science in order to legitimize and consolidate their status in colonial society” (Baber 1996:235–236; cf. Raj 1991). Science was not simply imposed by colonial authorities on the indigenous population of India. Different groups of Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, of different social and regional backgrounds, appropriated the discourse and practice of science to a variety of ends (Sangwan 1988).

On the one hand, science was reshaped in the light of religion: theoretical science was privileged over experimental work. The Brahmin

dimensions (e.g., social organization and context, implications of the concept of progress, relations to means of production and distribution, cf. Bernal 1965, 1:27–57). It is especially important to consider social and economic dimensions of science, in addition to its distinctive world-view, in discussions of non-western science (Jamison 1994).

elites — whose traditional status was due to their mastery of “clean” knowledge, above all the Vedas — sought to regain status through appropriating the new Western knowledge of science within their traditional paradigm of expertise: “For them science was experimental only in theory. . . . It is thus with the old image of knowledge *qua* clean knowledge that the *Bhadralok* sought those aspects of Western science that would best correspond to it” (Raj 1991:123).

On the other hand, religion was reinterpreted in the light of science:

Impressed and stimulated by scientific and industrial progress in the West, the [Western-educated Bangali] élite began to scrutinize indigenous religions and society in the light of scientific reason, not just rationality. Cultural traditions and social identities were realigned as the élite, infused and licensed by the sign of science, put science’s authority to work as a grammar of transformation to achieve the rearrangement of knowledges and subjects. (Prakash 1996:60)

Hinduism was reshaped in the nineteenth century: a convergence of science and religion produced an almost positivistic monotheism, a belief in the underlying oneness of all phenomena, with a new conception of Vedic tradition as based on the laws of nature (Prakash 1996:72–73).¹⁶

Attempts to prove that Ayurveda was properly scientific, and that religious elements are inauthentic, resonate in three ways with these discussions of science and religion in discourses on and in India. First, they assert a sharp distinction between science and religion. The quest for science in post-Vedic India presupposes its absence elsewhere, as if, in Ayurveda, we find the exception that proves the rule. This detracts from other aspects of ancient Indian culture: for example, the rationality of the logicians, the materialism of the Ajivikas, the empiricism of the Carvakas, and the empirical observations of the astronomers (cf. Wolpert 1989:86; Dasgupta 1987; Brockington 1981:74ff.; Seal 1982 [1915]; Prakash 1996:63ff.; Chattopadhyaya

¹⁶ Some scholars argue that Hinduism was not just reshaped but invented during these nineteenth-century developments (e.g., Frykenberg 1989; cf. Halbfass 1988:192, 260, 340) and also by the later consolidation of the field of comparative religion (e.g., Fitzgerald 1990; 2000:134ff.).

1982; contrast Chattopadhyaya 1977:3–4). Second, these arguments seem to presuppose the superiority of modern western science in the attempt to excavate something “rational” from ancient Indian traditions.¹⁷ Third, the conception of science appealed to is too narrowly positivistic, ignoring complex struggles over interpretation and definition.

These considerations lead us to stand back and take a closer look at the implications of using the categories of science, religion, and magic to make sense of these texts in the first place. On the one hand, we might take these terms as somehow natural, allowing us to use them to compare phenomena across time and space. On this view, science is science, religion is religion, and magic is magic in all cultures at all times. A common variant on this view is to take the modern hard sciences and Christianity as normative for “science” and “religion” and to look for analogous features in other historical periods and cultures. On the other hand, we might emphasize varying interpretations or constructions of these terms, by different cultures or scholars. At the relativist extreme of the latter view, categories vary so much from context to context that no possibility of trustworthy comparison remains. The first alternative seems too naïve and the second too sceptical to justify any attempt to engage in research or discussion under their banner.

There is another possibility, “wherein concepts and categories emerge as creatures of history and necessity” (Benavides 1997:303). On this view, religion and magic and the distinction between their respective realms vary across history and cultures according to comparable and investigable processes. The categories are constructed, but similarities

¹⁷ In this way, the search for science in Ayurveda parallels nineteenth-century Indian reclamations of a “rational” religious tradition. After a long period of mixture with Islamic and folk-medical traditions, including a greater emphasis on spiritual elements, Ayurveda underwent a process of “secularization” in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Leslie 1976:360). Arguments concerning the scientific nature of Ayurveda echo this period when “the Hindu élite relocated science’s authority in its ‘use in this world,’ not in its signification as a mark of western superiority” (Prakash 1996:81).

in the construction process allow us to pursue comparative studies. Benavides discusses “magic” and “religion,” but the emergence of science in the modern West cannot be distinguished from similar historical processes. For Weber, a key measure of historical processes of rationalization in western and non-western cultures was the disenchantment of the world, the degree of systematic organization of a worldview and the extent to which it eradicated magical thought (Weber 1958b:293; 1951:226; cf. Habermas 1981:205; Bird 1984). For Benavides, more specifically,

the emergence of categories involving the distinction between a realm identifiable purely as religious and one involving practices upon the physical world is an ever recurring historical phenomenon, having to do with processes that involve the centralization of power, the restriction of access to goods and the stigmatization of manual work. (1997:305)

In other words, conceptual tensions between “religion,” “magic,” and “science” often reflect social, political and economic tensions. Insofar as each of these terms can carry connotations of legitimacy or illegitimacy, they can play a role in processes of exclusion.

The hypothesis that historical shifts in the balance between concepts of religion, magic, and science reflect social, economic, and political changes is a productive one. More specifically, “the activities of the reformer and the skeptic become possible in interstitial situations”; the invention, “discovery,” or transformation of these concepts “can be seen as the necessary result of the dislocations produced by economic and political changes” (Benavides 1997:321; cf. Bourdieu 1991). This is not a zero-sum game, where an increase in the perceived legitimacy of one of these three terms is necessarily offset by the decrease of another’s. A specific approach recommends itself. In order to make sense of dramatic shifts in historical relations between “religion,” “magic,” and “science,” we can look for correlated social, economic and political changes.

This approach to historical conceptions of “magic” and “religion” has obvious relevance for the case of classical Ayurveda. The arguments we have considered all posit just such a dramatic shift: an abortive legitimization of science over against competing “magico-

religious” traditions. We are led to examine the context within which Ayurveda took shape, to see if the alleged divergence of “science” from “religion” reflected social or other tensions at the time.

Physicians and Brahmins

Classical Ayurveda took shape during a period when the social, economic, political, and religious landscape of North India was going through dramatic changes. The texts were written (at least initially) during the period of political fragmentation, increasing trade, and cultural enrichment between the fall of the Maurya and the rise of the Gupta Empires (Wolpert 1989:86). The religious landscape was rich: Vedic traditionalism, the elaboration of the Upanishads, the beginnings of devotional movements, the doctrine of karma yoga, and the codification of the major schools of philosophy gave “Hinduism” a varied texture. Jainism, Buddhism, and a variety of unorthodox traditions also flourished in the same time and space. Hence, it is misleading to posit a uniform post-Vedic culture as the “counter-ideology” that Ayurveda competed against (e.g., Chattopadhyaya 1977). This section considers the admittedly hypothetical possibility that tensions in the ayurvedic texts are best explained by social and economic competition between physicians and brahmins, not by conceptual tensions between the modern western categories of “science” and “religion.”

“Religion,” and by extension “magic” and “science,” delimit conceptual spheres that encompass contact between cultures as well as tensions within a given culture (Benavides 2001). For example, the eleventh-century Islamic scholar al-Biruni, discussing alchemy in the “Hind,” distinguished between magic and science: “We understand by witchcraft, making by some kind of delusion a thing appear to the senses as something different from what it is in reality. . . . Therefore witchcraft in this sense has nothing whatever to do with science” (1982:329). Among the examples of Hindu magic that he discussed, al-Biruni included “charms . . . intended for those who have been bitten by serpents” (1982:335). As noted above, exactly this sort of cure is found in the ayurvedic texts as well as the *Atharva Veda* (*Susruta*, Ka. 5.2–5; cf. Chattopadhyaya 1977:6). Where the magical aspects of

Ayurveda called into question its legitimacy from a later Muslim perspective, its empirical aspects appear to have placed it in tension with one specific stream of its contemporary religious context, the new orthodox, post-Vedic Brahmanism.

Throughout this paper, our attention has been turning from a general tension between science and religion to a specific tension between physicians and brahmins. The likelihood that *Caraka* has at least been reworked extensively, if it is not a compilation in its entirety, underlines the possibility that certain passages were later additions. Several passages are clearly in the interest of the upper caste: “Devotion to the gods and Bráhmaṇas [brahmins] . . . add to one’s good name, piety, wealth, progeny and duration of life” (*Susruta*, Ci. 24.43); “desire for inflicting injury upon the gods, cows, brahmins and ascetics” is a sign of insanity caused by the gods (*Caraka*, Ni. 7.11). It is arguable, in addition, that explicit references to *moksa* as the goal of life and *Brahman* as the true self are later impositions.

Some authors argue that the two primary ayurvedic texts manifest different degrees of brahminic influence. Filliozat argues that “the extremely brahminic contents of the *Caraka-samhita* . . . evokes the idea that its editor was . . . a Brahmin of a Vedic school” (1964:21). N. H. Keswani argues that “*Susruta* has tried to cast off whatever shackles of priestly domination remained at his time, and created an atmosphere of independent thinking and investigation” (cited in Chattopadhyaya 1977:35). However, this distinction is not persuasive. Both texts manifest significant brahminic elements, and the prevalence of a greater number of such passages in *Caraka* is easily explained by its more theoretical nature, in contrast to *Susruta*’s surgical emphasis (cf. Chattopadhyaya 1977:36). It is hard to credit *Susruta* with freedom from the “shackles of priestly domination” when confronted by a passage such as the following:

The god Brahma disclosed to the world the Atharva Veda together with the eight allied branches of Vedic literature and the science of medicine. And since a priest (Brahmana) is well-versed in the aforesaid branches of study, a physician should

act subserviently and occupy a subordinate position to the priest.¹⁸ (*Susruta*, Su. 34.5)

A hypothetical social argument for the scientific nature of Ayurveda might assert that it manifested one of the key characteristics of modern science, engineering and medicine, namely professionalization. *Caraka* demonstrates three signs of rudimentary professionalization among physicians: an emphasis on correct training; explicit standards of conduct; and a sharp distinction between true physicians and quacks. The classical ayurvedic texts are clear that physicians are to be trained in certain specific ways, and to always carry out their practices in accordance with the principles of medicine: an excellent physician is one who has excellence in medical knowledge, extensive practical experience, and purity (*Caraka*, Su. 9.6, 1.120–133). Following these principles, an intelligent physician can go beyond the text to find appropriate cures not given there (*Caraka*, Su. 4.20). False physicians and fakes are distinguished from genuine physicians (*Caraka*, Su. 11.50–53; Wujastyk 2003:33). One section of *Caraka* lists the characteristics of acceptable medical texts, teachers, students, and methods of study: suitable medical texts are acknowledged by “reputed experts,” “free from contradiction,” equipped with definitions and illustration”; suitable preceptors are those “equipped with practical knowledge,” “pious,” and whose “knowledge is not overshadowed (by the knowledge of other scriptures)”; and daily study should begin with “prayers to the gods, sages, cows, *brahmanas*, teachers, elderly and enlightened person and preceptors” and proceed to memorization of the text (Vi. 8.3–7). Once again, the same section of the text contains elements that can be read as “scientific” and as “religious.” An extensive list of professional standards of conduct is to be delivered to the students “in front of the fire, *brahmanas* and physicians” (*Caraka*, Vi. 8.13). Most significantly, the text enjoins respect for ayurvedic, religious and political authorities.

¹⁸ Sharma 1999:323 translates “the wise physician should abide by the advice of the priest.”

A second social argument for the scientific status of Ayurveda claims that the necessary conditions for its becoming an empirico-rational tradition were met when physicians cohered in the face of social marginalization. This argument seeks to bolster the claim that Ayurveda was scientific by demonstrating that ayurvedic physicians constituted a distinct social group marginalized in the face of an emerging brahminic orthodoxy. If it can be shown that the physicians were in tension with the dominant religious group, this adds plausibility to the claim that passages reflecting brahminic views and interests are inauthentic. This would be extremely persuasive support for the view that Ayurveda's scientific nature was cause and context of social tension with brahmins.

Zysk, for example, argues that physicians "existed outside the mainstream" of post-Vedic society, developing empirical techniques and knowledge through exclusive mutual interaction (1991:24).¹⁹ The *Dharma-shastras* (collections of legal and social ordinances that emerged during the period of Ayurveda's formation, before the writing of the classical texts) have numerous passages that disparage doctors, linking them to unclean social groups (Chattopadhyaya 1977:212ff.). Manu, for example, states that "Doctors . . . and people who support themselves by trade are to be excluded from offerings to the gods and ancestors" (*Laws of Manu* 3:152; cf. 3:180; 4:212, 220).

Susruta's instructions on learning human anatomy by dissecting human corpses are cited both as evidence that Ayurveda was scientific and as a factor in the marginalization of ayurvedic physicians (*Susruta*, Sa. 5.50–56; Zysk 1991:37; Chattopadhyaya 1977:94–100; cf. Seal 1982 [1915]:37). Contact with corpses would have been considered

¹⁹ Chattopadhyaya argues that the esteem of physicians was high, then dropped sharply as brahminic orthodoxy emerged. This allows him to paint the orthodox "counter-ideology" as the arch-enemy of scientific Ayurveda (1977:232ff.). Zysk, however, counters that "Chattopadhyaya wrongly concluded that physicians in the early Vedic period were highly esteemed, an error resulting from his sole reliance on mythological references in the *Rgveda* rather than a more comprehensive picture. . . ." (Zysk 1991:22).

extremely polluting, whatever its empirical advantages. The decision to pursue anatomical knowledge in this fashion could well have been a factor in the social marginalization of physicians.

However, this argument assumes that actual practices reflected textual injunctions. Basham holds that dissection was extremely rare until well into the nineteenth century, citing concerns with pollution and a general lack of the very practical knowledge that supposedly rendered Ayurveda scientific: “The complete ignorance and uncertainty of even the best-educated Indians of earlier times about the nature and functions of the various organs of the body is hard to realize nowadays” (1976:29; contrast Sangwan 1988:215). The classical texts’ statements that dissection *should be* carried out do not necessarily imply that it was; we cannot discount the possibility that ayurvedic physicians acted differently than the texts suggest (Obeyesekere 1991:422). It is hard to reconcile textual injunctions to learn by dissection with major gaps in anatomical knowledge presented in the texts: the heart was held to be the seat of consciousness, and the lungs were not mentioned (Zimmer 1948:161–169); even *Susruta*, with its elaborate surgical knowledge, fails to mention the brain, spinal cord, or pancreas (Sa. 5; cf. Bhishagrajna 1991:iii). With regards to the skeleton, however, both *Caraka* and *Susruta* are very accurate. This might suggest that ayurvedic physicians respected the taboo against touching corpses but made observations of skeletons (Zimmer 1948:175–177, cf. Basham 1976:27–29). It is not clear that dissection was practised to the extent necessary to cause the alleged marginalization of physicians, a marginalization held to be a social precondition of their development of a “science” of medicine.²⁰

²⁰ There is another way in which this argument for the marginalization of physicians fails to consider possible alternative explanations. The view that Ayurveda emerged in opposition to and was later absorbed or repressed by brahminic orthodoxy considers only external influences. However, counter to Zysk’s view, it is arguable that Ayurveda (like the religious traditions with which it was allegedly in competition) *failed* to establish itself as an independent empirical tradition because it *lacked* the proper social conditions. Max Weber argued that modern empirical science emerged after a long history of rationalization processes, primarily of the world-views of salvation

Nor is it clear that the social status of physicians in post-Vedic society was low or marginal. *Caraka* clearly places medical studies within the traditional caste system, citing its value for each of the three highest castes: “Ayurveda is to be studied by *brahmanas* for providing benefit to all creatures, by *ksatriyas* for protection and by *vaisyas* for earning livelihood” (*Caraka*, Su. 30.29). *Susruta* ranks the king’s physician almost on a par with his priest (*Susruta*, Ka. 1.5, cf. Basham 1976:32). Some ayurvedic physicians had powerful clients (Jaggi 1973:74). In general, ambivalence of social status appears to have been the case down to recent times, with physicians subject to both respect and denigration depending on circumstances (Basham 1976:32–39). The argument that marginalization of ayurvedic physicians provided the conditions for their developing into “working scientists” is not supported (Chattopadhyaya 1986:30; cf. 1977).

To sum up, the texts show clear evidence of rudimentary professionalization among ayurvedic physicians. However, this is not enough to establish the degree of isolation from their social context that would support Zysk’s claim that they developed scientific methods through exclusion and marginalization. On the contrary, many elements of this

religions. A certain type of rationality, a certain way of consistently motivating action, was characteristic of this historical trajectory. In Weber’s terms, Ayurveda manifested practical but not substantive rationality: orienting action with reference to individual interests not overriding normative principles (cf. Kalberg 1980:1164–1165). Ayurveda is inner-worldly but not ascetic: it seeks a long life of healthy happiness, but no larger goal demands allegiance. For Weber, only substantive rationality can provide the necessary conditions for institutionalization of values and for the resulting maintenance of a methodical way of life. That is, for a world-view to become established it needs a shared firmament of values to link beliefs and interests to social actions in a sustainable way. Lacking this, Ayurveda did not possess the necessary internal conditions to survive as an independent empirical tradition. It did not provide a framework of values that could serve as a motivational locus for people to organize their actions and lives around. On this view, Zysk’s “hinduization” process was, perhaps, not a result of conflict but of a lack of adequate social and moral conditions for stability and continuation. Ironically, from a Weberian perspective, Ayurveda may have suffered from an *absence* of rationality.

professionalization bear directly on the nature of relations between the physicians and other members of their society.

The denigration of physicians in the *Dharma-shastras* supports the view that tensions existed between brahmins and physicians. This was likely due in large part to the impurity of physicians’ contact with those outside the brahminical fold. I will end by considering another possible bone of contention between physician and priest, the obvious one of compensation for services rendered.

The brahmins were not securely ensconced in a divinely ordained and stable monopoly of religious goods. The emergence of “the Ideal Brahman” has been a central factor in the historical emergence of “Hinduism” as an object of academic study: but the resulting picture of a static social and religious order, with priestly brahmins holding supreme rank in a rigid caste society originally ordained by the Vedas, does not reflect the historical facts (Van der Veer 1989). The key factor in this valuation of the brahmins (both in the “religious” texts written by the brahmins themselves and in the “orientalist” texts written by western scholars, both of which have had significant normative impact) has been the reification of a certain economic ideology. At the time Ayurveda was developing, the brahmins were not a powerful entrenched monopoly, but they were well positioned to corner a large slice of a growing market of religious goods.

The key concept in the religious economy of Brahminism was *dana*. Etymologically, *dana* is derived from the verb “to give,” and it refers to “the act of giving, bestowing, granting, yielding and prestation, irrespective of what is being given and when” (Thapar 1976:37). *Dana* was, and is, the payment due for ritual services rendered. In the Vedic period, it was closely linked to ritual sacrifice financed by wealthy patrons (Thapar 1976:39; cf. Kane 1975, 2:837ff.; Gonda 1965:212). In the period we are interested in, kings and other royalty became the most visible donors, because of their wealth and the status they gained by granting and protecting endowments made to brahmins and religious institutions (Talbot 1988:2ff.). This most visible of the gifting relations that supported the brahmins misses the level at which we might expect to find competition between physicians and priests.

Three shifts in the nature of *dana* bring this potential for competition between physicians and brahmins to the fore. First, in the late Vedic period, *dana* shifted from “a channel of redistribution of wealth” to “a channel of deliberate exchange” (Thapar 1976:42). Second, a reciprocity between *dana* and merit arose in the classical period, perhaps influenced by the spread of Buddhism: giving to appropriate recipients, defined in terms of moral worth and caste, came to be seen as resulting in merit for the donor (Thapar 1976; cf. Kane 1975, 2:115). Brahmins were the most worthy recipients, but only if they are morally upright and well educated in the Vedas (Kane 1975, 5:937–938; cf. 2:116, 746, 845–6; Gonda 1965:226). Third, *dana* was increasingly set forth as a worthy form of behaviour for householders. This was explicitly enjoined in the *Dharma-shastras*, where *dana* is held to be the special duty of householders (Kane 1975, 2:837; cf. Gonda 1965:216). The same texts that told householders to give to brahmins told brahmins to accept nothing from physicians (Chattopadhyaya 1977:213).

The brahmins were broadening their market of ritual services during precisely the period when ayurvedic physicians were seeking to support themselves by offering medical treatments. This overview of the religious economy highlights the distinction between the two streams of “religion” that are present in the ayurvedic texts. The Vedic tradition provided the central metaphorical framing for Ayurveda, but this conceptual relation had little practical bearing on the livelihood of the physicians. The orthodox brahminic tradition, on the other hand, was changing in a manner that brought its experts in great economic and social competition with the physicians.

Physicians and brahmins were competitors. On the one hand, there was overlap in terms of relevant expertise. The degree of this overlap depends, to some degree, on the degree to which Vedic (“magical”) cures were part of the ayurvedic toolkit. In addition to the above arguments that Vedic elements cannot all be excised, the fact remains that “magical” diagnoses and cures are prominent through the ayurvedic texts, for example in *Susruta*’s otherwise admirably empirical section on toxicology (Ka.). And these passages are clearly distinguishable from those expressing brahminic views.

On the other hand, competition in a more profound sense may have emerged from the fact that Ayurveda shifted emphasis from an other-worldly to a this-worldly economy of human goods in a more profound sense than the *Dharma-shastras*’ emphasis on the aesthetic and material spheres of *kama* and *artha*. This is illustrated by the space that the ayurvedic concept of karma carved out for this-worldly causal explanations. Aside from competition for the opportunity to exercise their profession, Ayurveda proposed a competing theodicy, a possibility of this-worldly salvation based in part in empirical observation and experience. This can hardly have escaped the notice of the brahmins who were actively working to corner the market in salvation.

In the light of strictures and scriptures that set out the brahmins’ place in a developing religious economy, we must turn to the ayurvedic texts in order to compare the economic placement of the physicians. Here we encounter a curious, though enlightening, silence. The classical ayurvedic texts say nothing of fees, not a word regarding remuneration or gifts (cf. Jaggi 1973:74). We would expect to find some discussion of the economic integration of physicians whether their profession was entirely independent of or in sharp conflict with the brahmins. The absence of any account of a competing sphere of circulation of goods lends indirect support to the claim that the texts were edited by parties sympathetic to the brahmins, edited in a manner that minimized any reference to competition with the religious economy of the priests. One rare passage that hints at payment for medical services underlines this point even more sharply. One of the precepts to be passed on from master physician to students (in the presence of brahmins) states, “If you want to achieve success in your medical profession, earn wealth as well as fame and attain heaven after death. You should in all circumstances pay for the well-being of cows, brahmins, and all other living beings” (*Caraka*, Vi. 8.13).

The fact that no term equivalent to “science” emerged to frame both sides of this debate in the classical texts of the two parties illustrates a key point. Benavides suggests that “religion” emerges historically as a category within which traditions or cultures can negotiate their similarities and differences; the opposition of “religion” to “magic,” for exam-

ple, can function to reify the struggles for legitimacy that are implicit in such negotiations (2001; 1997). Concepts of “religion,” “magic,” and “science” can work in two directions, unitarily as umbrella terms encompassing the negotiation of similarity and difference, or differentially to claim legitimacy for one set of beliefs and practices over against another. In the present, “ayurvedic science” must refer not to a foreshadowing of modernity but to the space of an abortive struggle for legitimacy in post-Vedic India. This recognizes both the tension between physicians and priests and the fact that the development of Ayurveda’s alternative worldview did not proceed to the point where ‘science’ emerged as a “realm within such differences becomes visible” (Benavides 2001:106). Ayurveda appears to be “scientific,” not in a modern sense, but in sense similar to that in which medieval alchemy came to be seen as “magical.” The key issue was not the presence of empirical characteristics in a worldview that seems truer or more objective nearly two millennia later. The important issue was rather that Ayurveda presented a competing worldview to the brahminic orthodoxy that was attempting to extend and consolidate its position in the post-Vedic economy of salvation.

Conclusion

Classical Ayurveda was not scientific, in a modern western sense, despite claims to the contrary. It manifested a number of empirical characteristics, above all an emphasis on observation in diagnosis and therapy. It also produced a theoretical view of health and disease that privileged materialistic and this-worldly explanations. However, it did not manifest the defining characteristics of modern science: thoroughgoing materialism, purely empirical observation, experimentation, falsification of hypotheses and theories, rational quantification, a developed conception of proof, or logical concepts instantiating a scientific relation between theory and data. In addition, again despite claims to the contrary, Ayurveda lacked the social preconditions of modern science.

Nor did Ayurveda clearly distinguish between what we would now call “science” and “religion.” The many religious and magical

elements are not necessarily extraneous, marginal, or inauthentic. Vedic metaphors of cooking and magical views, for example, are much more common than references to brahmins or appeals to brahminic concepts (e.g., *moksa* and *Brahman*), and the former are more closely integrated with empirical passages (e.g., *Caraka*, Su. 7, 1.41–43; Vi. 3.36, 8.6–8; Sa. 8.59–66; In. 1.3). Other magical and religious elements are too prominent, too intermingled with empirical passages, and too explicitly acknowledged as part of Ayurveda to allow them to be simply explained away. However, there does seem to be good reason to credit the claim that *some* of the religious elements of the classical ayurvedic texts were added by parties sympathetic with brahminic orthodoxy. Such passages are only a small portion of the non-empirical elements of the text, and they are relatively rare and confined.

The entire issue of whether, or to what extent, Ayurveda was science or religion is misleading. Religion, magic, and science are not natural kinds. Why should we assume that these classical south Asian texts were ever intended to express the sort of unitary viewpoint suggested by these terms? *Caraka* states explicitly that holding rigorously to any single point of view leads to confusion: “Those who consider the varying controversial aspects of the truth as established facts go on moving in circles, like a person sitting on an oil press that moves round and round” (Su 25.26–28; cf. Larson 1987:251). Appropriately, *Caraka* considers a dream of riding on the wheel of an oil press to be a symptom of impending insanity (Ni 7.6).

“Religion” and “science” are modern western concepts. As such, they have the potential to import normative and ideological issues into discussions of “science and religion” in non-western and/or non-modern cultures. Moreover, this empty game of conceptual categorization distracts attention from more relevant social and economic issues. Looking for parallels to modern science tends to privilege ancient “science” over against its “religious” background without attending closely enough to the struggle for legitimacy implicit in this recognition and negotiation of difference in post-Vedic India. In addition, once the categories of “religion” and “science” are recognized as framing struggles for legitimacy, it becomes harder to distinguish the historical strug-

gles, allegedly the object of study, from struggles implicit in academic allegiances to theoretical perspectives and to their institutional affiliations (cf. Benavides 1997:305, 330). Attempts to unveil science as the authentic core of Ayurveda participate themselves in struggles for legitimacy.

Three practical points emerge that might be of value for studying science and religion in a non-western context. First, the attempt to clarify terms (e.g., “empirical” and “rational”) forces us to work in a more reflective manner and to be more sensitive to issues of translation and commensurability (cf. Tambiah 1990:111ff.). Second, we must go beyond categorizing phenomena simply as like or unlike western science. We can conclude, for example, that Ayurveda is empirical insofar as observation shapes diagnosis and therapeutic practice but not in the stronger sense that it leaves room for theory modification in the light of empirical anomalies. Moreover, this conclusion does not commit us to seeing empirical characteristics as excluding religious characteristics. Third, it is important to take account of social, economic, and ideological issues, allowing for a broader basis of comparison. Naively positivistic views of science and naturalistic or Christian-centered views of religion are clearly inadequate for historical and comparative work.

In the end, we are left with a reminder that terms such as “science,” “religion,” and “magic” involve many complex dimensions. They are not simple objective labels; rather, they frame a series of tensions between competing worldviews and academic perspectives. Comparative studies of science and religion in non-western cultures would be best served by attending to this complexity, lest we circle endlessly on the oil-press of rhetorical posturing.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

A Wealth of Small Articles, but Theoretical Reflections in Tiny Doses: An Evaluation of the New RGG⁴

HANS G. KIPPENBERG

Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft. Vierte, völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage, hg. von Hans Dieter Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski und Eberhard Jüngel — Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, vol. 1: A–B, 1998 (liv, 968 p.) ISBN 3–16–146901–1; vol. 2: C–E, 1999 (liv, 925 p.) ISBN 3–16–146902–X; vol. 3: F–H, 2000 (lxxviii, 992 p.) ISBN 3–16–146903–8; vol. 4: I–K 2001 (lxxi, 962 p.) ISBN 3–16–146904–6; vol. 5: L–M, 2002 (lxxv, 852 p.) ISBN 3–16–146905–4. Each vol. (cloth) EUR 214.00 (subscription).

Dictionaries are like wolves in sheep's clothing. They inform on subjects in a particular field from A to Z apparently without any opinions of their own. But actually they do much more: they establish ideas, subjects and problems and convey a distinct perspective to the reader, who mostly takes it for granted. No other scholarly tool succeeds to a similar degree in accommodating effective pre-scriptions in simple de-scriptions—to use a pun by Ivan Strenski.¹ This certainly applies to the fourth edition of the RGG.

The history of this dictionary (*Handwörterbuch*) is impressive. It has appeared from the same publisher since 1909, a publisher today directed by a descendent of the very same Paul Siebeck under whose guidance the first edition came into being. This continuity offers a unique chance to have a look behind the scenes and to disclose elements of construction of an 'innocent' dictionary. The first edition of the RGG (RGG¹) came out in the years 1909–1913, the second in 1927–1932, the third in 1957–1965; for the fourth edition (RGG⁴), the one here under review, the first five volumes have appeared. Three others are still to come, one each year. The preface to the new edition

¹ Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in the Twentieth-Century History. Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski*, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1987, 2.

is tantalizingly brief about that history; the mere 2½ columns ignore that intriguing issue. Yet the present edition is erected on a structure that derives from that inception; the reasons underlying it are tacitly assumed as valid today. Only by going back to the time of its beginning are we able to recognize the implications of its structure, the substance hiding behind the architecture. For that reason this review compares the fourth with the first edition. The correspondence in the years 1904–1906 preceding the first edition along with the preface of the first volume of RGG¹ reveal the reasons and decisions underlying its structure.²

Four basic elements run through the RGG¹ and its recent successor. All were the outcome of debates and decisions: an extensive number of entries; the adoption of popular catch-words; the involvement of non-theological disciplines; a division of subjects according to history, society and tradition.

“A wealth of small articles”

The number of entries is remarkable. According to my rough estimate, the eight volumes after completion will contain 10.300 entries. Since many of the entries are internally subdivided into parts written by different authors, the figure is even higher, according to the assistant editors in Tübingen, about 20.000. A comparison with the other German encyclopaedia of religion, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, reveals the difference: its 36 volumes contain “merely” ~2.200 entries. The abundance renders the RGG an invaluable instrument for scholars, particularly since a bibliography is added to each entry. But its generous structure was not self-evident. It was the publisher, Paul Siebeck, who, from the very beginning, seems to have had the firm intention to create a “scholarly reference book for everybody,” similar to the *Brockhaus* (Paul Siebeck in July 1904 in a letter to Köhler).³ Some of the early protagonists had still to be convinced, as a letter by the editor

² I was able to check documents preserved in the archives of the publishing house J.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) in Tübingen. The most relevant of them are collected and made accessible by Alf Özen in an internal typescript: *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Erste Auflage)*, Tübingen 1989. I am grateful to Alf Özen and Dr. h.c. Georg Siebeck for permitting me to use it.

³ “Wissenschaftliches Nachschlagewerk für Jedermann”: Alf Özen, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Erste Auflage)*, Tübingen 1989, 6.

in charge, Friedrich Michael Schiele, to the publisher reveals: "Regarding the structure of the dictionary Rade and myself are not fully in agreement with Baumgarten. It seems to me that he puts too much emphasis on the *big* articles, while the tremendous impact the dictionaries in the preceding century exerted on the way citizens were thinking depended nearly exclusively on the fact that the user met the scholarly conviction of respected men in the dictionary in *small* doses. With big articles they would never have had the success and the favorable effect on the culture of the citizens as they did" (letter of 4-19-1905 by F.M. Schiele).⁴ Accordingly emphasis was laid on a "wealth of quick orienting small articles," though there was no lack of big programmatic articles.

The name Martin Rade attracts attention because he was a prominent member of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. Other founding contributors were also members of its circle, although this does not hold true for all of them. What made the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* so concerned about the fine grained structure of a dictionary in its field? The answer can be found in a new appreciation of history. With this group of scholars an awareness of the historicity of all religious dogmas and ethics spread in Protestant theology. In contrast to the preceding generation of liberal theologians, the historicity of all religions, including one's own, was stressed and, accordingly, biblical Judaism and Christianity were reconstructed as phenomena of their particular time and culture. In order to show the contexts of Jesus and St. Paul in the Jewish and Hellenistic religions of their time, new concepts became necessary. Apocalypticism, asceticism, eschatology, salvation religion, gnosticism, mysticism, etc., became fundamental notions in understanding the teachings and the acts of Jesus and the apostle Paul. They conveyed a particular reconstruction of the past, one that emphasized the critical distance of early

⁴ "Hinsichtlich der Anlage des Wörterbuches sind Rade und ich nicht ganz mit Baumgarten einverstanden. Er scheint mir zuviel Wert auf die *großen* Artikel zu legen, während doch der ungeheure Einfluß, den im vergangenen Jahrhundert die Konversationslexika auf die Gesinnung unseres Bürgertums ausgeübt haben, fast ausschließlich darauf beruhte, daßin *kleineren* Dosen dem Benutzer des Wörterbuches die wissenschaftliche Überzeugung von Männern entgegentrat, die Vertrauen verdienen. Mit großen Artikeln hätte das Konversationslexikon nicht den Erfolg gehabt und nicht, wie es geschehen ist, die Bildung unseres Bürgertums im günstigen Sinne beeinflußt."

Christianity towards the existing world. This was not by chance, since this interpretation implied a critical stance towards liberal theology.

The religio-historical school did not acquiesce with the “strangeness” of the Christian traditions in their incipency. By applying a strict historical and comparative method, it attempted to recover a genuine lively religiosity beneath the writings of early Christians. For that reason it did not stop with an examination of the literature and its sources, but proceeded to determine the previous oral forms and genres, assuming that an unwritten tradition was much more valuable than a written one, since it was closer to genuine religious life and experience. That process was attractive to educated Germans at that time, men and women who resented the rise of modern society and suspected its emphasis on rationality as a dangerous threat to the spontaneity of the individual. A reintegration of non-rational forms of religiosity was expected to counteract that danger. It was also due to that concern that there existed a high interest in the varieties of religiosity in general and of religious world rejection in particular. A critical attitude to the world, thanks in part to the RGG¹, became fundamental to theology and to religious studies and has since lost nothing of its power and brilliance. That the RGG¹ gave preference to an abundance of entries is the result of a sense for historical differences fueled by critical reflections on modern culture.

Adoption of popular catch-words

The adoption of popular catch-words was likewise any thing but self-evident. From the many terms that offered themselves as entries, those were chosen, we are told, that were presumed to suggest themselves to the user of the dictionary, even if they were far from those of the specialists.⁵ The dictionary was designed to adopt the popular catch-phrases of the present day, accidental as they are according to their nature.⁶ Every dictionary in this field is still confronted with the very same alternatives: either to adopt terms circulating in public, even if inadequate according to the specialist’s criteria — or

⁵ “Für die Wahl der Stichwörter galt durchweg das Gesetz, unter den vielen Ausdrücken, die sich als Schlagwort für eine Gedankeneinheit anboten, immer dasjenige Wort zu wählen, das den Benutzern des Handlexikons voraussichtlich am nächsten läge, mochte es den Fachgelehrten auch ferner liegen.” RGG¹, vol. 1, 1909, V.

⁶ RGG¹, vol. 1, 1909, VI.

to replace them directly with scholarly terms. Catherine Bell, in her study on ritual, a term widely regarded as problematic by scholars, has offered a clear vote on the issue: "To try to discard the term ritual just when scholars have been successful in popularizing its use would imply a desire for esoteric categories accessible only to cognoscenti."⁷ By using popular terms the dictionary — and the discipline in general — is able to show the public relevance of scholarly work and to contribute to a superior understanding by that audience.

"To whom is our generally comprehensible dictionary aimed? Since today religion has again become a mighty and visible power, those who sense most intensely the lately awakened force of religion first and most urgently deserve a reference book on contemporary religion." Not the scholars, but the many who "take an independent interest in the present religious dynamics."⁸ Here the preface recalls the circumstances of its own time, a time in which religiosity spread and boomed beyond the confines of the churches. Thomas Nipperdey in his study on religion in Germany between 1870–1918 called that phenomenon "'vagrant' religiosity."⁹ Religious traditions circulated independently of their 'official' status. These traditions were able to get approval for principles that differed from the traditional faith since they derived from a reflection on the modern world. Instead of aspiring to an eternal salvation *of* their soul, people were searching a salvation *for* their soul: this the pun, by means of which Georg Simmel characterized the very same phenomenon.¹⁰

Though in comparative religion it still is disputed whether dictionaries should adopt popular, although controversial, terms, the new RGG⁴ sticks to the very same position, as e.g. the entry 'Fundamentalismus' confirms. That designation has been popularized by the media and was intended to deprecate particular religious groups as devoid of modern reflexivity.

⁷ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992, 7.

⁸ **"Für wen ist unser gemeinverständliches Wörterbuch bestimmt?** Weil die Religion heute wieder eine gewaltig spürbare Macht wird, bedürfen in erster Linie und dringend eines Nachschlagwerkes über die Religion der Gegenwart diejenigen, welche die jüngst erwachte Kraft der Religion am lebhaftesten empfinden." These are not the scholars but the many who take "ein selbständiges Interesse an der religiösen Bewegung der Gegenwart." RGG¹, vol. 1, 1909, IX.

⁹ Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch. Deutschland 1870–1918*, München: Beck, 1988, 143 ("'vagierende' Religiosität").

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, *Die Religion*, Frankfurt: Rütten & Löning, 1922, 78.

Though the entry correctly calls it a polemical notion (“Kampfbegriff”), it concedes to it nevertheless a “scientific-diagnostic significance”—provided one acknowledges that the notion relates to a phenomenon typical of the modern world. The RGG⁴ even expands the entry from 1 column in 1958 to 12 columns today and traces the phenomenon not only in Christianity, but also in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism.

Involvement of non-theological disciplines

According to the founders of the RGG, a reference dictionary was lacking that dealt with the church and Christianity in the present day world. Dealing with religious issues could no longer be reserved to theology alone. New disciplines had to complement the established ones: “non-Christian history of religions; arts, and music; pedagogy; social sciences; ecclesiastical law and church politics; contemporary Christianity.”¹¹ The positive evaluation of these disciplines is remarkable. While most theologians were irritated by the increasing independence of other approaches to studying religions, here the very same development was hailed and regarded as a special and new task of the dictionary. The new comparative and historical method permeated the new dictionary which abandoned a sharp distinction between Christianity and the “non-revealed” religions.¹² It is remarkable that the dictionary embraced the plurality of scholarly approaches to religions. One of the reasons was given by Ernst Troeltsch, known as the systematic head of the “Religionsgeschichtliche Schule.” According to him, naïve religion, as far as one can grasp it, reveals the essential elements of the phenomenon. But this naïve religion should not be understood as being the genuine, pure, true religion, compared to which the scholarly reflected one is merely spurious, false, contaminated: “Religion affected by the impact of scholarship becomes something else, and necessarily does so.”¹³ Scholars of other areas

¹¹ Preface RGG¹, vol. 1, 1909, quote V and VIII.

¹² RGG¹, vol. 1, 1909, IX.

¹³ “Die naive Religion, soweit man ihrer habhaft werden kann, führt auf die wesentlichen Grundzüge des Phänomens, aber sie ist darum nicht etwa die echtere, reinere, wahrere Religion, der gegenüber die wissenschaftlich reflektierte die unechtere, gefälschte, mit fremdem Beisatz vermengte wäre.” “Die durch die Einwirkung der Wissenschaft hindurchgegangene Religion wird eine andere werden und muß eine andere werden.” Ernst Troeltsch, “Wesen der Religion und der Religionswis-

were expected to render “naïve” religion into an academic one. It was the conviction of Ernst Troeltsch that modern sciences would prove the superiority of Protestantism.

Dividing subjects according to history, society and tradition

The subjects the entries referred to were not derived from a-historical religious experience, but displayed in their primary contexts. In the case of “apocalypticism,” for example, the RGG⁴ introduces as subsections, “Hebrew Bible,” “Ancient Judaism,” “New Testament,” “Church History,” “Dogmatics,” “Islam” and “Art History.” Each subsection is treated by a different author. A host of other items are divided in a similar manner, fitting the subject. Sometimes a comparative section precedes the specified ones. This structure assumes a difference between the *one* notion and the *many* subjects subsumed under it; it presumes that notions do not derive directly from the material they refer to, but from discourses. This is one of the reasons that the headings are different when one compares the subsections of subsequent editions. In previous editions Judaism was conceived of as “Old Testament” — a category of Christian theology. The new edition replaces it with “Hebrew Bible” or “Judaism,” reducing the Christian perspective. Entirely new subentries were created regarding “Islam,” for example when dealing with “Conversion” (“Bekehrung/Konversion”) or “Confession” (“Bekenntnis”). The subsections on Islam are however in most cases shorter than the other subsections — as if some kind of silent judgment rules over the allocation of lines and columns. The subsections on “Islam” take into account a most important recent development: the return of Islam to Western culture. While philosophers in the 18th century — Jean-Jacques Rousseau e.g. — reckoned Islam among the European religions, that view had nearly completely disappeared in the 19th and 20th centuries. The RGG⁴ not only acknowledges the new Islamic presence in the West, but responds to that challenge with an important innovation.

Changed perspectives also affect entries on women. One example is the appearance of the partners of well-known men. In earlier editions there existed only Theodor Fliedner, founder of the Kaiserswerther Diakonie. His

senschaft,” in: *Christliche Religion mit Einschluß der israelitisch-jüdischen Religion (Die Kultur der Gegenwart. Ihre Entwicklung und ihre Ziele*, hg. von Paul Hinneberg, Teil 1, Abt. 4), Berlin/Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1906, 461–491, quotes 468 and 469.

wife Friederike, who substantially contributed to that foundation, received her own entry only in the new RGG.

Structural inconsistencies: no contemporary thinkers

The achievements of the new RGG are tremendous. When there are deficiencies that really matter they are a question of structural inconsistency. Two deficiencies are particularly deplorable: the absence of contemporary thinkers and lacunae in contemporary religiosity.

Since the third edition the discourse on religions has been profoundly influenced by contemporary thinkers. None of them is mentioned, none addressed adequately in the RGG⁴. One of the few exceptions is the philosopher Hans Blumenberg, who has outlined a daring interpretation of the history of the West since Antiquity, one that conceives of the legitimacy of modern age in terms of religious history. Scholars of various other disciplines (the philosopher Odo Marquard, the historian Reinhart Koselleck, the jurist Ernst-Wilhelm Böckenförde) joined that discourse, a discourse that had been stimulated by ideas of Carl Schmitt. One may be happy that at least Blumenberg is mentioned, although his entry consists of a mere 12 lines — exactly as many as are devoted to John Blow, organist at Westminster Abbey from 1668 to 1708. One looks in vain for other contemporary philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, or Jean-Francois Lyotard. In the preface we find an “explanation” for this strange fact: the editors have decided not to adopt biographical articles on living persons. Apparently Blumenberg owed his entry to his death in 1996, — one year before the survey of lemmata was fixed in 1997. When reviewing the first survey of entries one discovers that an entry for Hans-Georg Gadamer had been planned. Was it prevented by his living too long, one is tempted to ask? Gadamer’s hermeneutics, linked, as it is, to Schleiermacher, was crucial for an entire generation of philosophers, historians, and theologians. The premature death of Michel Foucault in 1984 did secure him an entry, but not an appropriate one: 13 lines plus bibliography had to be sufficient. This decision of the editors deviates fundamentally from the previous editions. Who would have hit on the idea when preparing the third edition, not to include “Karl Barth” only due to the fact that he was still alive?

Any decision has its price. That price can be estimated by turning again to the first edition and to the entry on “Heinrich Rickert.” It deals extensively (in 3 columns, not in 12 lines) with Heinrich Rickert and identifies in his work

a basic issue of the time. The aim of Rickert's work was, the user is reading, a vindication of historical knowledge in its independence and special nature. "An epistemology of history should obtain and secure the peculiar right of the science of history."¹⁴ History, the author explains, is constituted not by natural laws, but by the special and unique action of individuals. To be able to conceive of that subject, the historian is in need of specific notions and concepts. Rickert found them in the cultural values operating in the actual conscience of the historian. The realities of past events are processed by these values.¹⁵ The entry on Rickert makes it obvious that the biographies of contemporary thinkers helps to identify the main intellectual and scholarly concerns and problems that other scholars too are engaged in. The issue itself was taken up in RGG¹ in a systematical entry "Kulturwissenschaft und Religion (Geschichtserkennen und Naturerkennen)," arguing that religious knowledge shares the problem of historical knowledge generally.

The obvious disadvantages created by the missing entries makes the deviation from the established practice of the dictionary puzzling. The question is unavoidable: Is it wrong to assume that the lacunae must be explained in other terms than the editors are doing, namely as an avoidance of involvement with the big issues in the entire field of cultural studies today, those created by the recognition of the gap between data and their scholarly representations? That crisis of representation affects scholarship in various disciplines such as history, anthropology, philosophy, ethics and religion. The entry "Heinrich Rickert," decennia ago, not only reveals the amazing persistence of that problem; it also demonstrates that a previous generation of scholars had aspired to help in clarifying that issue. The present generation of editors apparently had less courage. The place for an entry addressing the construction of historical knowledge remains empty; it is not filled by "Geschichte/Geschichtsauffassung," since there that pressing issue is ignored. Only a much too brief article on "Kulturwissenschaften" points out that the constructed nature of cultural knowledge is a tremendous challenge

¹⁴ "[...]E]ine Erkenntnistheorie der Geschichte soll das eigentümliche Recht der Geschichtswissenschaft gewinnen und wahren." Samuel Eck, "Rickert," in: RGG¹, vol. 4, 1913, col. 2314–2317, quote 2315.

¹⁵ "In konkreter Geschichtswissenschaft sind es die allgemeinen Kulturwerte, die im Gegenwartsbewußtsein des Historikers leben, von denen aus er die einmaligen Wirklichkeiten der Geschichte zu erfassen sucht," o.c. col. 2316.

for scholars today. Actually that entry shows the different value attached to that problem today. What once was a solid pillar in the building of an entire dictionary is now turned into a small and subordinate piece of merely 1½ columns. While the editors carried on an established structure, they ignored the underlying theory and decisions on which it was built. They refurbished the rooms, not the structure of the building—the entries, not the pertinent theory.

Another shortcoming is belied by the claim of the title: “Religions in Past and **Present**.” The impression given of a systematic updating of items is not carried through. One example are the “Alevites,” a religious group among Turks and Kurds, persecuted by Sunnis and Osmanic rulers for centuries—on account of their understanding of Islam as an esoteric belief, not as legal system. With Kemal Atatürk’s laicism that group’s situation has gradually improved. Since the nineteen eighties its adherents have dared to come out in public, abandoning their old practice of dissimulation. Due to this very recent development it is understandable that the previous editions did not devote an entry of its own to that community. Since a considerable part of the migrant workers from Turkey to the European Union today are Alevites, they form a special case when it comes to the issue of the integration of Muslims in the Western societies. They certainly deserved an entry. A fine example of updating, on the other hand, is “Black Muslims.” The entry sketches briefly the history of the Nation of Islam in the USA.

A certain indecision regarding the integration of contemporary data is obvious in several cases. The relevance of the “Antichrist” stops with Friedrich Nietzsche, although in the twentieth century that figure exerted a tremendous impact on political currents in the US. There are other places where one can observe that the collaborators of RGG⁴ are unsure where they should draw the line. Dealing with comparative religious categories is crucial, since our knowledge of the power of religions today depends on it. But to do so one needs a theory of religious history addressing and not evading the issue of construction. Since the structure of the first edition was the outcome of an extraordinary scholarly effort in this regard, a critical evaluation of it in terms of the issue today would have added to its value.

None of the critical remarks can diminish the tremendous achievement of the new dictionary. On account of the unprecedented number of entries written by experts in the field, each provided with a bibliography indicating the state of research today, it will be *the* outstanding reference dictionary in re-

ligious studies. In their preface, the editors, two of them faculty members at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, emphasize the international and ecumenical character of the dictionary's perspective and contributors. So it is not surprising that an English translation is in preparation, to be published with E.J. Brill, Leiden.

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BOOK REVIEWS

INGVID SÆLID GILHUS and LISBETH MIKAELSSON, *Nytt blikk på religion. Studiet av religion i dag* — Oslo: Pax 2001 (181 p.) ISBN 82-530-2252-2 (pbk.).

It seems that we are witnessing a period in which the study of religion takes stock of its development one generation after the last heroic attempts at drawing the big picture. While the *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (5 vols. 1988–2001) is finally completed, all major classical encyclopedias are in the process of being updated and new ones emerge on the market. Moreover, collective volumes such as the *Guide to the Study of Religion* (2000) or the *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998) try to map the field. In recent years, in Europe, three introductions to ‘Religionswissenschaft’ have been produced, two of them by German scholars. Books of this genre fulfil different functions and are designed differently, the two German specimens going to extremes: While Klaus Hock (2002) represents the classical disciplinary approach, Hans G. Kippenberg and his disciple Kocku von Stuckrad (2003, see review in *Numen* 3, 2003) sketch recent debates (in the English speaking world), mostly based on their own primary research. For students, probably none of these books alone will be very helpful, but taken together they provide a good survey.

Unnoticed by these authors, one year previously, two female colleagues teaching at the University of Bergen (Norway) had already published an introduction to the study of religion that sought to move in the middle ground. The structure of the book—the title can be translated as “A New Look at Religion. The Study of Religion Today”—seems rather conventionally post-phenomenological and hides the fact that most relevant ‘posts,’ ‘neos,’ ‘isms,’ and concepts (such as ‘power’) are in fact taken into account: Apart from an introduction, its chapters deal with the category of religion (pp. 15–35), the comparative approach (pp. 36–59), historical, or rather historiographical, perspectives (pp. 60–79), the notions of symbol (pp. 80–101), myth (pp. 102–120), ritual (pp. 121–140), and gender problems (pp. 141–163). Unfortunately, apart from a bibliography, an index of names, and an extremely selective list of key scholars—with Engels, Girard, and

Goethe being listed, but Max Weber missing! — it does not provide further services to the reader (such as pointing to web-resources or important works of reference and bibliographies). Moreover, it is entirely text-based and does not present any illustrations or pictorial/iconographic materials. The book clearly aims at undergraduate students. It does not presuppose any substantial knowledge about religion or the study of religion. This makes the book extremely useful. Because the book is directed towards Norwegian students, it deliberately highlights the contribution of Norwegian scholars in the field, e.g. in its selection of case-studies. Therefore it is an unlikely candidate for a translation, which it would otherwise merit. Most chapters present a balanced combination of theoretical questions and empirical studies, occasionally suggesting ideas for further enquiry. Sometimes the authors come forward with meta-communicative statements of a reflective nature (“what is it we are doing?”). While most chapters faithfully mirror the current state of the international debate, some reservations are to be made when it comes to the chapters on myth and symbol. Probably, more introductions to the study of religion will be written in the years to come; potential authors would be well advised to take a look at this nice book by Gilhus and Mikaelsson.

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GERRIE TER HAAR and JAMES J. BUSUTTLIL (eds.), *The Freedom to do God's Will. Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change* — London and New York: Routledge 2003 (254 p.) ISBN 0-415-27035-9 (pbk.) Euro 22.68.

The events of September 11, 2001 have led to a sharper perception of religion and its traditions. Religion is neither something belonging to the past, nor is it harmless: it is rather an essential factor which stamps the modern society as well as determines its political actions.

The latter are often linked to a prominent but utterly dubious notion: that of religious fundamentalism. The present volume makes this notion a subject of discussion but dissociates itself consciously from a popular or even media-generated view on fundamentalism. As the title of the volume already implies, fundamentalism cannot be seen separate from social change; even more: it is an expression of social change within a society. Taking this basic idea as a

starting point for further reflection, the articles are primarily concerned with the diverse functions of fundamentalism in society and only secondarily with its characteristic contents.

The volume documents the influence of fundamentalist thought upon religious traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Here, each one of the 10 articles itself as well as their sum provide remarkable insights. Sharifah Zaleha, for example, proves that the Islamic revival of the 1970s gained momentum at a time of radical social change. Similarly, while scrutinizing North American circumstances, Nancy Ammerman demonstrates that in the 1970s North America, too, saw the foundation of a fundamentalist organization thus showing that religious fundamentalism cannot be attributed to Islam alone.

Each one of the articles would deserve a brief presentation but the reviewer has to confine himself to the volume's most important lines of argument. These three major research findings concerning fundamentalism and social change become most evident:

1. Fundamentalism has a function in the description of groups both by themselves and by others. Fundamentalist movements are social movements and as such the products of social changes. Not religion itself but the social circumstances accompanying it are the decisive factors in their development. These factors are urbanization and technological innovation, ethnic and religious pluralism, and the creation of the nation-state. As a rule, these factors induce a break with traditions, to which certain social groups react.
2. This reaction does not necessarily imply violence. Fundamentalism is not *eo ipso* violent. Thus, as H.L. Seneviratne emphasizes, fundamentalism in Buddhism implies a return to a Buddhist utopia that traditionally includes pacifism and the conscious cultivation of non-violent behavior. The use of violence is limited to small groups of extremists (C. Ram-Prasad illustrates this in the case of India). Still, as R. Scott Appleby shows in his article, religious fundamentalists consider the time they live in to be very special and requiring a departure from normal standards and procedures, thus allowing them to abandon a tradition of tolerance and peace and resort instead to intolerance and violence.
3. Elements of fundamentalism include (A) a return to traditional values and an accompanying sense of restoration, which may stimulate and contribute to the building of alternative structures, (B) the search

for a new identity, often at the expense of minority groups, (C) a preoccupation with moral concerns that tends to have an adverse effect on the position of women. Thus, an important sub-theme of the volume is the effect of fundamentalism on women in their countries. In many cases women are excluded from public life. This is still the case even in Israel where Golda Meir held highly esteemed political positions, as Alice Shalvi points out.

In this fallback upon the past only those elements are retained which are considered helpful in furthering the specific agenda of religious fundamentalists in the different countries. Often there is a fallback on sacred history, which draws its sources not necessarily from written religion but also from oral religion. Sacred history, which is being associated with the central role ascribed to the divine in human society, is positively contrasted with secular history, which is seen/interpreted as a deviation from original tradition.

The reviewer certainly agrees with all these points but would like to raise one question: How does the book's proposed view of fundamentalism differ from the concept of apocalypticism? The above mentioned criteria cited to define fundamentalism also apply to apocalyptic movements for the most part. Within the current understanding of apocalypticism it is also the marginalized groups that selectively take up older traditions and either violently or—within a pacifist separatist movement—peacefully wish to restore older forms of rule or hope for a better world.¹ In this context, the apocalypse has a very similar political dimension as pointed out by J.J. Busuttill in the concluding article.

On the whole, the volume gives proof of the fact that fundamentalism is not primarily a religious but a social phenomenon. It is also pointed out that this is not a one-way process, but social movements are also inspired by religious ideology and vice versa. Another important insight is that fundamentalism cannot just be seen as an instant phenomenon but as a process that develops over time. Accordingly, it cannot be considered in the context of singular occurrences, whether it is the political revolution in Iran in 1979 or the events of September 11. The articles of the volume illustrate this circumstance quite clearly and the fact that they were discussed at a symposium held

¹ See H.G. Kippenberg, "Apokalyptik, Messianismus, Prophetie" in: H. Cancik, B. Gladigow and M. Laubscher (eds.), *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. II, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer 1991, 9–26.

in April/May 2000, i.e. one and a half years before September 11, only strengthens their arguments. Last but not least, one may wish that the volume attains its aspired aim to reach a broad public including both academics and non-academics.

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ROBERT ACKERMAN, *The Myth and Ritual School. J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* — New York and London: Routledge 2002 (¹1991) (234 p.) ISBN 0-415-93963-1 (pbk.) £18.99.

The first achievement of this study lies in the focus of the four Cambridge ritualists, J.E. Harrison, Gilbert Murray, F.M. Cornford, A.B. Crook and in the demonstration that Jane Harrison was the central figure. Three opening chapters introduce us to the major trends in the study of religion that were present in late 19th century England: Enlightenment rationalism, Romantic organicism and philology, and finally the new anthropology (Lang, Tylor, Smith). A chapter on Frazer (summarizing the author's *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Thought*, Cambridge 1987) is there mainly for negative results: his theory of mental functioning is what the Cambridge ritualists rejected.

Jane Harrison participated in the renewal of Greek studies made possible by the introduction of archaeological findings. The entrenched tradition of "lower criticism" (establishing texts and their grammatical construction) was invited to look at novel evidence. But she wanted to root texts in lives in yet a richer way; she always liked to argue on things rather than on words. What anthropologists were saying on primitive minds enabled her to turn the lights on the archaic or "dark" periods. Instead of being seen at the beginning of a "classical" history, Homer was placed at the end of a long process. Instead of conveying knowledge about "mythology," tales of possible literary interest, telling of superficial gods, stories great for children (if bowdlerized), but representing no threat whatever to the settled ideas either of convinced Christians or of confirmed atheists, the four scholars started examining primitive rituals, savage, emotional, and, most important, socially and psychologically powerful. Jane Harrison was in for an uphill fight: beside Nietzsche, she read Durkheim and Bergson. (Practically everyone at

Oxford and Cambridge considered them as unneeded as Derrida and Foucault have been more recently.) To make things worse, the leading lower critic in Cambridge was an anti-feminist and the Euripides specialist thought so highly of him that he considered him to be a sort of Victorian anti-clerical gentleman. To all these rationalist evolutionists who saw mental progress as consisting in the focusing increasingly on “facts,” the Cambridge ritualists opposed an acceptance of the permanent power of collective patterns of thinking and doing, and an acknowledgement of the irrational elements in human emotions—which can be graced through art. (Hence the importance of Harrison’s small book on *Ancient Art and Ritual*, 1913). For a detailed study on the parallel rise in France of anti-positivist thinking, see Camille Tarot, *De Durkheim à Mauss. L’invention du symbolique. Sociologie et sciences des religions* (Paris, La Découverte, 1999).

With the help of unpublished letters and Harrison’s own *Reminiscences of a Student’s Life* (1925), the author shows the context of the production of the spate of decisive works by the four ritualists in the years 1912–1914, including Harrison’s *Themis* (which followed the earlier *Prolegomena to the Study of Religion* (1903) and Murray’s *Four* (later *Five*) *Stages in Greek Religion*. All rested on the hypothesis of an ancient (soon to be labeled dionysiac) ritual of a “Year god” who goes through the cycle of the seasons, namely disappearance and renewal. The study of Greek religion (or of any religion) could not be the same any more. Thus the author gives us insight into the making of a major intellectual revolution.

The book’s second achievement lies in showing how the works of Murray and Cornford on the rise of tragedy and comedy started a new way of looking at literature and especially at the theater. (It is “one and the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theater.”) Literary critics could discuss the “origins” of drama without being submitted to the relentless criticism of classicists and archaeologists who sift the scant historical evidence, string their rare facts on a long thread, and usually fail to see how anything could come out of anything else. A sense that the whole human race is capable of “vibrating at the same pitch as the string of mythic memory is plucked” enables this literary school to find in ancient texts meanings that are relevant to contemporary minds. Northrop Frye, heir of this whole tradition, did not advance any historical argument; “Ritual is the *content* of dramatic action, not the source or origin of it.” The *Anatomy of Criticism* classifies genres by reference to the four seasons.

The book is attractively written and successfully nails down its important points. Bayle was not the first to see parallels between ancient Greeks and modern “primitives.” Lescarbot made the point in 1609 and Lafitau developed it in 1724. The bibliography is well focused. For the background on the Enlightenment, I would have added J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion. Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (Yale University Press 1987). On Harrison there are two good articles by Renate Schlesier and Jan Bremmer in *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik*, edited by Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi (Marburg, diagonal Verlag, 1991).

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Datenatlas zur religiösen Geographie im protestantischen Deutschland. Von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg. Hg. von LUCIAN HÖLSCHER unter Mitarbeit von TILLMANN BENDIKOWSKI, CLAUDIA ENDERS und MARKUS HOPPE, 4 vols. — Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 2001, vol. 1: *Norden* (xv, 750 p.); vol. 2: *Osten* (xxvii, 826 p.); vol. 3: *Süden* (xxvii, 724 p.); vol. 4: *Westen* (xxvii, 726 p.) ISBN 3-11-016905-3 (cloth) Euro 348.00.

Religion in modern times (in Europe!) is in progressive decline — with respect to the commitment to the rites of the Church. But decline of what? Of the “good old times,” the age of faith, the Middle Ages? Attending the mass once a year for repentance and Communion was a sufficient demonstration of faith for laymen in medieval times. Should Christianity go back to the “good old times” of the era of confessions? When contemplating the period from Reformation to French Revolution from the point of view of comparative history of religions, this period seems extraordinary. The ‘decline’ then means rather coming back to normality.

Lucian Hölscher, a historian of Modern History at Bochum University, and his team compiled data from German Protestant churches, which these had gathered since 1862 and continuously from 1880 to 1930 “to fill needs for information and face social realities.” The motto of 1893 complains: “figures are dead, but these dead figures cry to the living God.” (“Zahlen sind tot, aber die toten Zahlen schreien zu dem lebendigen Gott.”) Is it the case, as H.

maintains, that the decline began as early as around 1800? Or is it due to the fading social importance and control of public commitment in ecclesiastical rituals?

The introduction to the four huge volumes is very brief; in the preface the editor refrains from interpreting the data: “to unfold the supposed meaning, however, remains the task of the users” (vol. 1, v). One can understand the reason for this reserved attitude when reading a case study by Hölscher and U. Männich-Polenz. They analyzed the data for the city of Hanover (in: *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 88, 1990, 159–211). There the people who were willing to partake of the Eucharist had to apply by name. Thus H. and his team were able to compare the names with those in the address-books. It is an enormous effort but it provides a sound result. The religious regeneration around 1900 was due to a revival and intensification of bourgeois religiosity, rather than to an expansion, by gaining new clientele, especially among the migrant class of workers.

In the Introduction (vol. 1, p. 1–20), Hölscher deals with “religious geography,” especially in Germany (compared with the data in France, gathered by Gabriel LeBras and Fernand Braudel). The rest of the introduction with 3 maps is the same technical information, printed in every volume. Two indexes of sites and archives complete each volume. The program of “the religion of the bourgeois” was outlined by Hölscher in 1990 (*Historische Zeitschrift* 250, 595–630, cp. “The religious divide in 19th century Germany,” in: Helmut Walser Smith (ed.), *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany 1800–1914*, Oxford 2001, 33–48). A fine short summary by the author can be found in an introductory in Rubin www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/rubin/rbin2_00.

The statistics offer the figures for the following issues: (1) how many inhabitants of each region (Land) of the German Reich were members of the protestant church; (2) how many partook of the Eucharist; (3) how many went to the services; (4) how many were baptised; (5) how many married with or without the church’s rites, among them the mixed couples — nothing about divorces; (6) how many were buried with or without religious rites, among them the cremations — no comment on the churches refusing cremations; and (7) how many entered or left the church. Many questions are left uncommented. But the lay-out of data, maps and charts is offered splendidly.

Vol. 1 provides the statistics of the Northern Landeskirchen: Braunschweig, Bremen, Hanover (140 p.), Mecklenburg (150 p.), Nordelbien (in-

cluding Hamburg and Lübeck 200 p.) and Oldenburg. Vol. 2 contains the evidence of the Landeskirchen of Anhalt, Prussia ("altpreußische Union"), Saxony and Thuringia. Again there is a striking difference in the database provided by the province of Saxony as part of Prussia with some 400 pages of meticulously counted commitment to Eucharist, baptism, burials etc. or the church of the Free State of Saxony and that of Thuringia with each 140 pages, whereas the church of Anhalt offers only 8 pages. One may guess that Eastern Germany — after World War II the socialist part of Germany — already in the 19th century constituted a 'desert' in the view of churchmen. Vol. 3 shows the figures of the traditionally 'pious' Southern Germany, Baden, Bavaria (330 p.), Alsace (in the time of 1880–1918), Wuerttemberg (230 p.). Vol. 4 provides data from the West, i.e. Churches of Hessen, Kurhessen-Waldeck and Hessen Nassau (each 150 p.), of the Palatinate and Rhineland, Westphalia (120 p.), and at the end data from the Reich. The number of conversions, or rather of becoming member (or quitting membership) in 1933 climbed up to 320 000 new members of the Protestant churches, whereas in 1940 the negative maximum of 370 000 persons left the church.

The data are restricted to the Protestant churches. What about the Catholic confession? The process of erosion of the Church has to be compared with the counter-example of the re-Christianization in the USA (Finke/Stark 1999). There are enough data for religion, there must be more data analyzed like this for the German Protestant church. And interpreted like the Hanover example: both an exciting and laborious task for future research. The *Datenatlas* is an excellent point of departure.

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CHRISTOPH AUFFARTH

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Books

(Listing in this section does not preclude subsequent reviewing)

Hölscher, Lucian (ed., with Tillmann Bendikowski, Claudia Enders and Markus Hoppe), *Datenatlas zur religiösen Geographie*. 4 vols. — Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 2001, 3056 p., €348.00, ISBN 3-11-016905-3 (cloth).

Waldron, William S., *The Buddhist unconscious. The ālaya-vijñāna in the context of Indian Buddhist thought* — London and New York: Routledge 2003, 269 p., £60.00, ISBN 0-415-29809-1 (hb.).

Pietilä-Castrén, Leena and Marjaana Vesterinen (eds.), *Grapta Poikila I* (Papers and Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens, 8) — Helsinki: Foundation of the Finnish Institute at Athens 2003, 132 p., ISBN 951-98806-1-5 (pbk.).

Neudecker, Reinhard, *The Voice of God on Mount Sinai. Rabbinic Commentaries on Exodus 20:1 in the Light of Sufi and Zen-Buddhist Texts* (Subsidia biblica, 23) — Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 2002, 157 p., €15.00, ISBN 88-7653-6199-1 (pbk.).

Despland, Michel, *Comparatisme et christianisme: questions d'histoire et de méthode* — Paris: L'Harmattan 2002, 196 p., €17.00, ISBN 2-7475-3309-3 (pbk.).

McCutcheon, Russell, *The Discipline of Religion. Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* — London and New York: Routledge 2003, 317 p., £19.99, ISBN 0-415-27490-7 (pbk.).

Zetterholm, Magnus, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch. A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* — London and New York: Routledge 2003, 272 p., £50.00, ISBN 0-415-27896-2 (cloth).

Mack, Michael, *German Idealism and the Jew. The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* — Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2003, 229 p., £24.50, ISBN 0-226-50094-2 (cloth).

New Books from Mohr Siebeck

The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered

New Perspectives on the Second Jewish
Revolt against Rome
Edited by Peter Schäfer

The Second Jewish Revolt against the Roman dominion (132-135 CE) considerably changed the political and cultural landscape of Jewish Palestine. This volume is based on a conference which took place in November 2001 at Princeton University and gathers a distinguished array of scholars working at the forefront of research on the Bar Kokhba period.

2003. xx, 313 pages (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 100). ISBN 3-16-148076-7 cloth \$112.00

Imre Peres

Griechische Grabinschriften und neutestamentliche Eschatologie

Imre Peres analysiert etwa 1000 griechische Grabinschriften, von denen die wichtigsten im Originaltext und in Übersetzung wiedergegeben werden. Er macht wichtige, meist nicht oder nicht mehr bekannte Quellen für Theologen und Religionsgeschichtler zugänglich und erschließt so die neutestamentliche Eschatologie in ihrem religionsgeschichtlichen Kontext.

2003. Est. 350 pages (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 157). ISBN 3-16-148072-4 cloth \$89.00 (September)

Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra

The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity

The Day of Atonement from Second
Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was the most important festival of late-antique Judaism, but its influence on Christianity was not generally recognized. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra here not only reveals the profound influence of Yom Kippur on the rituals, institutions, mythology and theology of early Christianity up to the fifth century but also offers the first detailed analysis of the festival itself.

2003. Est. 440 pages (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament). ISBN 3-16-148092-9 cloth est. \$102.00 (October)

Wolfgang Spickermann

Germania Superior

Wolfgang Spickermann präsentiert die Religionsgeschichte der germanischen Provinzen von der Eroberung durch die Römer bis zum Aufkommen des Christentums.

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Prices vary according to exchange rates.



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Michael Dörnemann

Krankheit und Heilung in der Theologie der frühen Kirchenväter

2003. Est. 400 pages (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity). ISBN 3-16-148161-5 cloth est. \$68.00 (November)

Michael Maas

Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean

Junillus Africanus and the *Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis*. With a contribution by Edward G. Mathews, Jr.

2003. XII, 280 pages (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 17). ISBN 3-16-148108-9 paper \$56.00

Literarische Konstituierung von Identifikationsfiguren in der Antike

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Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754

Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar ihres Horos, besorgt von Torsten Krannich, Christoph Schubert und Claudia Sode, nebst einem Beitrag zur *Epistula ad Constantiam* des Eusebius von Cäsarea von Annette von Stockhausen

2002. VIII, 133 pages (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 15). ISBN 3-16-147931-9 paper \$27.00

Rainer Hirsch-Luipold

Plutarchs Denken in Bildern

Studien zur literarischen, philosophischen und religiösen Funktion des Bildhaften

2002. XII, 324 pages (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 14). ISBN 3-16-147752-9 paper \$67.00

Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike

Untersuchungen zu Organisation, Ritual und Raumordnung
Herausgegeben von Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser und Alfred Schäfer

2002. VIII, 310 pages (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 13). ISBN 3-16-147771-5 paper \$73.00

Prices vary according to exchange rates.



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ISSN 0029-5973 (*print version*); 1568-5276 (*online version*)

Printed in The Netherlands

Printed on acid-free paper

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